











# **This Burning Heat**



# This Burning Heat

*by*

MAISIE WARD

*"Think not strange this burning  
heat which is to try you, as if  
some new thing happened to you."*

—I Peter IV. 12

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To My Sister  
THERESA BLUNDELL  
OF CROSBY

Sweete Jesu with thy Mother Myld  
Sweet virgin mother with thy child  
Angells and saincts of each degree  
Redresse our countrees myserie.

. . . . .

Geeve judgment Lord, twixt them and us  
The ballance yett let pittie houlde:  
Let mercie measure their offence  
And grace reduce them to thy foulde,  
That wee, all children of thy spouse  
May live as brethren in thy house.

WILLIAM BLUNDELL OF CROSBY  
1560-1638

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## Preface

A PASSION for documents is my one part in the historian's make-up. In this war, documents abound—what are usually called “human documents.” And if it is too soon to set them in the perspective necessary for authentic history it is still possible to get from them a vivid picture of what is happening in people's souls.

The materials for this book have come to me almost by chance: letters from friends to me or to my friends: notes on movements in which I happen to have shared: together creating a picture different from any yet thrown upon the American screen—different because taken from a different angle. Theories abound as to the inevitably de-spiritualising effect of war. These documents show the spiritual effect of *this* war on a number of widely different people who are actually living through it. They suggest how under this especially searching trial men are answering questions almost as old as the human race—What is good and what is evil? Is the soul immortal? Why does God allow such suffering?

The philosopher in his study asks these questions, and the more comfortable his study the more negative his answers seem to be. The problem of evil is seen starker from a cushioned armchair than from the gridiron of St. Laurence.

All royalties from this book will be divided between the work in England of the Grail and the *Catholic Worker*.

Maisie Ward.

Torresdale, Pa.





# **This Burning Heat**



## CHAPTER I

# Before the Blitz

THE declaration of war was a relief from a state of tension. There was certainly no rejoicing as there had been pretty widely in 1914. The nation had rather the feeling of a man who has at last decided that an aching tooth must come out. There was a frank dread of what was about to happen! We had decided: the tooth must come out: half-out would not do. But we did not expect to enjoy it. So we listened for the sirens that should presage overwhelming air raids. We listened too over the radio to the news that grew daily worse. But, although the Russian treachery meant utter disaster for Poland, it was almost a relief, as a friend of mine wrote to me, "to have the evil thing unmistakably aligned against us."

The first morning at Mass in Horley, the large village or small straggling town where we live, I remember hearing the sirens sound and two or three zealous wardens hurried out of the church. But there was no air raid. This was the beginning of a condition that prevailed for some time, causing one newspaper to ask pathetically how it was managed that air raids and air raid warnings never by any chance coincided. Yes, we did have raids even in those days, and they bred in us a marvelous sense of security. For the first bombs that fell in Scotland succeeded in killing only a rabbit, while those which came nearest to our Surrey home fell harmlessly on Ashdown

Forest. We practised the blackout zealously but that was because the wardens had nothing better to do than to discover a thread of light and get you fined heavily for showing it. We believed indeed that they invented infringements of the regulations to have some excuse for their own existence.

What a laughing stock they were, with their tin hats and their flash-lights, their non-existent duties and their anxious busy-ness! Later on Hitler turned them into heroes, but in those days we were all blind to their potentialities. Theirs was, however, one of the few outlets for the zeal that filled us all in the first weeks of war. Looking back upon it, I see the smothering of that zeal as the worst error of the Chamberlain Government. Initiative was utterly discouraged. We were all to wait and in due course we would be told what the government wanted of us. So we waited. And as we waited our zeal diminished and our boredom grew.

One good thing came of that long slow wait. Even a government whose solitary idea appeared to be to keep its citizens safe was obliged to relax some part of its precautions when no bad air raids occurred and the pressure of public opinion grew strong. The assembling of people together was again tolerated—and we of the Catholic Evidence Guild resumed our meetings in Hyde Park and on the street corners of England's larger cities. It was much slower travelling to and fro than of old but we managed to get there. Speaking in the blackout was a weird experience. On a moonless night, one could not see the crowd at all—simply the blackness looked a little blacker where they stood. But crowds came and many asked questions in the blackout who would never have asked them in the light.

Father Vincent McNabb again walked across London all the way from Hampstead to Hyde Park and took the stand in his white Dominican habit. One cold day I remember he and a lay speaker between them collected all the crowd there was, so that the other meetings had to close down and the platform with the crucifix stood alone at Marble Arch. The crowd those days was apathetic—like most of the country. It took Dunkirk to awaken them!

The meeting over, we would go back to Horley by a combination of train and bus that seemed infinitely slow. Here too was work to be done, for many Catholic children had been evacuated into our neighbourhood from London. It was quite a problem getting enough teachers to handle Sunday school for nearly ten times our usual numbers and to find accommodation for all the classes. Through the summer, groups were instructed on the lawn and even my twelve year old daughter was pressed into service to instruct the little ones. After Mass on Sundays the lawn was crowded with airmen and soldiers to whom we offered tea or beer: they usually chose beer. Summer lasted almost through September. Then October rosary began. Our little church built with the idea that it should be brilliantly lighted, resisted all the earliest attempts at a blackout and Rosary had to be finished before it grew dark.

Many people writing of evacuation have stressed the effect it had in reminding country people of their social responsibility concerning the slums of our great cities: for the first time vast masses of Englishmen were made to see what slum life really meant. But to me the war awakened a new sense of social responsibility just where I lived. Our poorer neighbours were also our very good friends, worshiping with us in a church that stood on our



garden. But I am ashamed to say that I had insufficiently considered their problems in the social order. The only attempt my husband and I had made at Catholic social action had been, some years earlier, when we bought a farm and tried to work it with boys from one of the Catholic Land Movements.

What a farm it was! If it was possible to know less about farming than we did those boys from Glasgow knew it. Our only fairly peaceful period followed the advent of two Irish maids who milked the cows and secretly counseled our young Catholic farmers concerning pigs, poultry and sheep. My husband, fresh from his own efforts at ploughing, remarked with pride "other people's farms are failures, but our farm is a farce."

Long before the war we had rented our farce of a farm to a practical farmer and acknowledged defeat on the Catholic land front. But now all the talk was of growing more food. It was an obvious step to plant our own flower borders with vegetables and to substitute fruit trees for rose bushes. But what could our neighbours do whose little cottages boasted such *very* little gardens? "Dig for Victory" said the posters and Father Vincent McNabb wrote a lovely little article in which he begged us to say rather "Dig for life." The return to the land was long overdue: could not the war be made at least an opportunity for a return to the primal sanity of contact with the earth and all growing things?

I have called Horley a village, but in fact, on the old village life had been imposed a vast mushroom growth of villas making a kind of dormitory for commuters to London offices. The speculative builder had not only scored heavy successes: he was hopeful of more. All around us large spaces of barren field carried his boardings "Valuable Building Land Ripe for Development".

I have never understood what makes a field ripe after this fashion. Certainly nothing else ever ripened in these fields and many of them had carried their hoardings for fourteen years to my certain knowledge and probably much longer. Some of them were in the very midst of huddled cottages and one large field had been snatched by the builders from allotment holders who now had no ground on which to grow their vegetables. In other towns such fields were being taken back for the purpose by the local authorities. Why not in Horley?

An attack on the local Council seemed indicated and a canvass of the likely men in our congregation and of their friends showed how quick the response would be to any opportunity offered to them. An article in a London newspaper, a larger poster lettered in scarlet "Is Horley Peculiar" displayed in various local shops, finally a letter to the Horley paper promising the equivalent of fifty dollars prize-money for the best vegetables grown on an allotment worked wonders. Prodigies were performed in the way of eradicating brambles and cleaning up dirty ground by the hundred competitors for the prize who appeared within the first month or two. It was merely a case of offering an opportunity to secure action by and for the people.

Everyone too who had a little space and a little money was starting chickens or even pigs, and evacuee children were often among the keenest in helping. I was touched by one bricklayer to whom I had given some baby chicks; he got up every morning at four to "bring them along" with a hot water bottle.

In January 1940 my husband and I left England for our visit to our publishing house in America. We crossed the Channel to Boulogne—we were forced to wear life-

belts but saw no other sign of war except an occasional English airplane overhead. Paris we found less fiercely blacked out than London. Our glimpse of Spain was a cheerful one and we left Lisbon on an Italian boat. The Blessed Sacrament was reserved in the ship's chapel; there were several Masses and Benediction each day, and the friendly Italian chaplain (in the intervals of talking about G. K. Chesterton whose work he knew thoroughly) assured us that Mussolini was a great man who would keep their country out of the war. The only real reminder that tragedy already stood in our midst was a Polish priest who spoke to us in broken phrases of the crucifixion of his country. We had to converse in Latin as he had no English and I remember his saying that the part of Poland under Germany suffered worse than the part under Russia, for with the Germans it was "terror cum intelligentia" and with the Russians "terror sine intelligentia".

We returned to England in April, going this time by Naples and spending two days in Rome. There too—just two months before Italy came into the war—everyone told us that Italy would avoid war and that her sympathies were with the Allies. Sitting up all one night on a crowded train for Paris we talked to a Polish officer and a young French woman who had been working at the Ecole de France in Rome. The same dark shadow was on the face of the Pole when he spoke of his country but they were both full of optimism about the war and the resultant future. In England the spring was awakening, work going ahead in gardens and allotments, the lengthening evenings made the blackout more endurable and a spirit of what seems now wholly unreasoning cheerfulness seemed universal.

Then began the procession of disasters: Denmark, Norway and the Low Countries swept over by the war machine. Two pictures haunted me. One was of our friend Father Martindale saying as he set off for Denmark, where he was caught by the German Invasion: "If anything is to happen to me pray that it may be quick. My poor body won't stand much more". Later we gathered that he was quite well treated but just now we were haunted by the question of what was happening to him.

The other picture was created in my imagination from my own past memories of nursing wounded soldiers during the last war and from a story in one of the papers. The journalist told simply how a marine off a British destroyer came into a farmhouse on the Norwegian coast. He was one of a party of wounded waiting there for relief "his arm had been blown off, but he sat there for hours not making any complaint".

Then came the debacle in France and Belgium and the agony of terror for those whose own men were in the retreat. Our May rosary was held later in the evening and many who were praying in our little church had husbands and brothers in Boulogne or Dunkirk. One friend whose husband was in the army, although not yet abroad, wrote to me:

Will you spare a few prayers for me? I have written of plans but I cannot express how remote their fulfilment seems. But God has been so good to us that I just try to leave every thing in His hands and believe that He will counteract my weakness. It is easy to think you will be able to bear crosses because of *the* Cross, but when they actually come one is so re-

bellious. But as Abbot Butler so admirably says if the Cross in actuality seemed bearable it would cease to be the Cross—bearable is not the word—I can't just find the one I want. This separation from my husband is a very steep bit of the road.

The Miracle of Dunkirk was very vivid to us in Horley. For not only was the man who had always stoked our chapel fires one of that army but also Horley was on the road of their return. Day and night the troop trains passed through and you could climb up the railway bank and see the dirty, unshaven, happy faces; happy because, although they were our army in retreat before greater masses of men and the unanswerable tanks, yet wherever they had been able to meet the enemy "out of their tin cans," they had found they were his equal and were looking forward to meeting him again. Redhill station was closed for a while to ordinary traffic and there the men were given cigarettes and tea. Their very passing left an afterglow on the faces of the helpers that was remarkable to see, and the railway porters were going round giving one another the familiar "thumbs up" and exchanging the broken French phrases that seemed to them so comic.

Our house stands where five roads meet and the paths of four aerodromes pass over it. Still only British planes were flying overhead and we all had an extraordinary confidence in our defenses. Personally I was far more afraid of a failing food supply than of falling bombs, and my one thought was to grow food and still more food.

Not everyone felt thus. A friend who lived fifteen miles away from us wrote:

With invasion at the gates all chance of meeting seems momentarily gone.

It is a nightmare to think of Sussex under temporary doom of invasion—but I expect it is punishment and when we have Peace and Victory we will try to live better simpler lives.

The attempted invasion won't be for 3 weeks? or 4 weeks?

After the last May rosary in the Church, a group of parishioners accepted the Grail assignment of a daily Rosary with arms outstretched.

"Can I let my arms down between the decades," asked a poor old lady with rheumatic limbs.

The paper which set forth this appeal was written by a Lady of the Grail:

*Will you join the PRAYER FRONT?*

The Battle of Lepanto was won by prayer, by the rosary. It has been proved over and over again that it is prayer that decides the issue of battle. Prayer is the strongest power on earth, and beside it the massed lines of ten thousand tanks can be as so many pebbles.

The Western Front, the Home Front, the Northern Front, are all depending on the *Prayer Front*. And all of us can join in. Only it must be real prayer, and sacrifice united to it. It must be repeated and unending prayer, it must go on night and day, through bad news and better news. It must be unwearying and persistent and dogged and unflagging. For that is the test of prayer—to go on and on, no matter how unavailing it may seem to be. The widow went on imploring the judge until he got tired of listening; the man begged bread from his friend until it was given to him only to stop his

unending requests. "Pray without ceasing" Jesus said, and He has given us the stories of the widow and the begging man for our imitation.

We are asking a group of members and friends to make an unending chain of prayer, night and day. We shall say the rosary because it was the rosary that saved Christendom at Lepanto and because this country is Mary's Dowry. We shall say the rosary with our arms stretched out in the form of a cross, because that was how Moses prayed on the mountain while the Jewish army fought below. So long as he held out his arms his people pressed on to victory, every time they sank in fatigue the Jews were in danger of defeat. We can try to take the place of Moses; with each one saying the rosary every day we shall have uplifted arms night and day and unflagging prayer night and day. And we shall go on until God gets tired of hearing our voices! "Shall He not avenge His servants who call on Him night and day?" Jesus said.

*Will you say the rosary (5 decades) in this way every day, choosing your own time, and keep this leaflet before you, as a constant reminder of your share in the Prayer Front? Do more than join in. Recruit others for the Prayer Front. There can be few people left who do not see that our fight is against the spirit of evil and not against flesh and blood. The best, indeed the only, weapon against Satan is the power of God and the intercession of Our Lady. "Even though my Son should shatter the world for its wickedness" she said to a priest who lived through the last war, "I should take the pieces*

back to Him and ask: 'Please put it together again.' "

Then pray now, as you have never prayed before. And be confident, no matter what happens. God knows what He is doing. With this weapon of prayer night and day from a group who desire above all God's Will, and armed with the Intercession of His Mother, we may feel that we have the power to control the issue. "It all depends on me!" say that before you start your time of prayer. Remember the ten just men who could have saved the cities of the plain. There are more than ten of us, and God's promises do not fail.

Allowing ten minutes for a rosary it took 144 members to form a complete circle for the twenty-four hours. One circle was made instantly and then the Grail began to try for another. Parish priests in various churches gave out the leaflets and sometimes suggested the formation of a circle by their congregation.

At this point my husband and I took rooms in London for a few weeks, before starting off once again for our American office. It was good to be in town in more leisurely fashion than the hasty hours "up for the day" gave one. People seemed divided into those who were awaiting rather tensely the outbreak of the Blitz, and those, like our landlady, who remarked complacently:

"You will be very comfortable here, and anyhow, it's safe."

The house in fact almost touched St. Mary's Church on Cadogan Street and my sister was to write to me only a little later, "The Church which we visited just before your departure is, I am sad to say, quite destroyed."



This feeling of safety arose partly, I think, from the belief that Germany would not, in England anyhow, bomb non-military objectives, partly from an immense confidence in the strength and effectiveness of our defences—the anti-aircraft guns, the balloon barrage.

I visited Yvonne at Grail Headquarters, Sloane Street, where the smartest snack bar conceivable was drawing large crowds of Women Auxiliaries of every lettering (W.R.E.N.S., W.A.A.C.S., A.T.S., etc.) and also at the Training House at Eastcote. The Ladies of the Grail were founded in 1921. They are a religious society of lay-women devoting their whole lives to the lay apostolate after a training of three years. In 1932 they came to England; in the same year they went to Germany; in 1934 they started in Scotland; and in 1940, at the special invitation of the late Cardinal Mundelein, they started their work in America, in the diocese of Chicago—at Libertyville, Illinois. Associated with them are the Members of the Grail, ordinary lay people who help in various ways. It is not I think fanciful to see in the waves of daffodils and tulips stretching for miles around the Mother House something of the inspiration that has made the Grail a thing of so much light and colour. Give them a shabby house and in a few weeks it will glow like a field of tulips. In all their English houses the chapel especially is a jewel in a worthy setting. It is austere—no chairs or benches—but abundance of light and colour. The Ladies of the Grail are prepared for their work by a Novitiate in the course of which they spend six months working amid the surroundings where their future Apostolate will be. My own most intimate friend among them has described to me the factory in Holland where she was able to establish

for the girls who worked by her side a pleasant flower-filled club and dining room instead of the horrible messy unventilated hall that the management had provided.

Naturally a movement with such a background would find superb opportunity in war-time England. Headquarters in London became the only Catholic club for all the women auxiliaries in His Majesty's forces. Headquarters at Eastcote became a busy farm, with goats, chickens and vegetables to add to the necessary home-grown food, and the centre of a radius of the most intense spiritual activity. They began an apostolate in the air raid shelters. On the invasion of the Low Countries the current issue of the Grail Magazine already in print was destroyed and a quite new number took its place. "The War is the Passion," "The Comforting of Christ," "The Words on the Cross" were the titles of articles in which the war was treated as the Crucifying of the Mystical Body of Christ on earth today, in which we as His members must copy Him.

Love can and will save the world, because this war is Christ's passion in us, and if we dare now to act by faith and to pledge ourselves to let His love be as strong in us as His pain is, then it will bear fruit, in proportion of grief. . . .

We can imitate Him literally. He was mocked and crowned with thorns. He remained silent. If our determination to love our enemy, to include the enemy in our prayers and sacrifice is at moments beyond us, we can imitate His gentle silence, and go on, wearing a crown of thorns in our mind. . . .

We must put by all else and be ready to give all we have to the very last drop of our blood to bring

about our one single purpose. That purpose is to gain and keep freedom. . . . This is not a special war, a side line, or a mere analogy for Catholics, no, freedom is the possession of the Inward Kingdom, and to keep it as Christ would keep it, is the heart of the whole war; we are doing the same as all the rest, but because of the unmerited grace of Faith, our responsibility is greater, we have to do it with a deeper understanding.

And so to the Magazine the Grail has added "dispatches," brief leaflets urging us to the prayer and penance that saved Ninive, to the ardour of love and justice that would have saved Sodom had there been but ten just men in all the city. When Cardinal Hinsley decreed for all English Catholics a week of prayer and penance Grail members were asked to abstain for a week from all cosmetics—no lipstick or powder, no rouge or mascara. Another dispatch stresses the saying of night prayers on our knees and never in bed (in a cold English house this is a special temptation).

The Grail were not alone in praying. We saw St. Mary's, the church near us in Chelsea, and Westminster Cathedral, which lay on our way to our office, crowded every morning. The Rosary was being said all day at St. Dominic's Priory and at the Oratory—led by any lay person if no priest could be present—literally without ceasing from the opening to the closing of the Church.

I knew people were praying—all the people, not Catholics only. And I was set thinking as often before of why it is that so small a proportion of those who pray discover that the Catholic Church is the home of prayer. It is not that we have rivals in the field of organised religion but

rather that so many, repelled by organised religion, dismiss us with the rest. Would the war, I wondered, alter this.

And then I had a visit from Father Bevan, the Oratorian, who told me of the great number of converts he had under instruction and how full of hope he was. One young army officer had said to him, "We shall win this war, Father, but only when we are obliged to say, '*Non nobis Domine non nobis*'—'Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Thy name give the glory.'"

That was one side of it. The whole country must learn to kneel before God. We Guild speakers in the Park found the crowd terrifically impressed by the miracle of Dunkirk. Our army had seemed lost and we had prayed and God had heard us. And we told them that this was only a beginning of prayer: we had asked God and He had done what we wanted. But true religion is not simply getting God to do what we want: it is offering God to do what He wants. We must ask Him to teach us to do His Will.

Is it merely a coincidence that Father Bevan is a Catholic Evidence Guild priest or are we really learning from the platform what the people want of us and of the Church? When we first went out twenty years ago we certainly were too external in what we told them. We ourselves had lost touch with the depths of the Catholic mind. We are learning through personal suffering as well as through our work to sound those depths again.

Noteworthy was the extent to which Cardinal Hinsley was becoming a spiritual leader of the English people. In one large mess his first radio address brought every officer around the microphone. They had started by courteously offering the nearest seat to the Catholic chaplain.

themselves going on with their cards and cigarettes and conversation. But before the end, the Chaplain told us you could have heard a pin drop. When in the second talk the Cardinal cried out "Down on your knees, every one of you, and beseech God's mercy" the effect was electric. This old Yorkshireman, with just a touch in his voice of the northern burr, gets at the heart of his countrymen and is the one really powerful radio voice the war has brought forth.

Yorkshire, Lancashire, Durham, are the counties in England with the strongest native Catholic tradition. Very many families here kept the faith through persecution times and have it as an inherited treasure from their English Catholic ancestors. This is especially true in the villages. In the towns these hereditary English Catholics have been further strengthened by a big infusion of Irish.

It was in a Lancashire town that the Catholic Worker Movement, born in America, established its first House of Hospitality, later launching southwards to London. The London house just now was infinitely pathetic. The head of it is a convert German Jewess, who had suffered bitterly under Hitler but whose spirit of love and forgiveness was utterly beautiful.

In a few inches of earth behind the house she was trying to grow vegetables. In the poor and miserable surroundings of a London slum she was inspiring a tiny group of Catholics to prayer and consideration of the Catholic Order and ideals.

In Lancashire it seemed possible to go forward a little more, among a larger number of Catholics, in immediate aid and in future planning. Great things have been done by Bob and Molly Walsh (former Evidence Guild speakers) and Mary Power in the way of Christmas help

in the town of Wigan, a large city with alas, a big slum area; and in keeping the newspaper in being. Now, however, Molly, with her two young children, felt the moment had come to try to combine family life with a beginning of a "return to the land" for the worker movement in England.

From Garden Cottage, Standish, she wrote:

My present aim is, by paying for the produce we consume to replace the money spent in order to start another family in due course. This place is simply ideal for a community of families, with even cottages well placed. We are learning all we possibly can and a lot of the Wigan people come out, so we can awaken their interest by showing the thing in practice. Of course, there are more people working now than for many years; but it is well to sow seeds now for the slump which is inevitable when the war is over.

*The House of Hospitality News* tells how things stood in June with this little community:

We have for ages realised that our work in the town was not complete without some foothold in the country, but I don't think we visualised that our prayers would be answered in quite this way. It is the war which has really forced us to take this step now, thus splitting up our sadly depleted forces. But we mean frankly to keep our gaze on what we *have* got and what with God's help we *can* do even at this difficult moment, rather than waste our time in futile regrets.

*This Burning Heat*

Three things please me immensely.

(1) I now have an opportunity of really entertaining a few of the many friends I made in Wigan among those heroic women of whom we have often written, who have struggled through the many years of unemployment and now are face to face, as we all are, with even deeper sorrow, as husbands and sons go off to face God knows what suffering. Here, to a few of them I can offer a week or so's real rest and let the beauty of nature do its healing work.

(2) I am relieved of the constant anxiety of getting Michael and Francis into the fresh air and giving them the kind of food they need. We hope to be able to grow sufficient food to keep ourselves, 148 Wallgate and other families in vegetables and eggs (as we get more expert probably, in goat's milk and honey and rabbits as well).

(3) In addition to providing food, which of course at the present time is all important, we are learning and when the war is over we will have something real with which to begin the work of reconstruction. A friend who has always been more than good to us has given us a sum of money to buy necessary tools and livestock to start with. This I shall repay as we get the benefit of home grown things and our ambition is to be in a position to help others to set out on the road back to sanity through a community of families helping each other.

The work in Wigan is continuing though two people have to carry nearly the whole burden, but because we are convinced it is God's work we know that somehow He will "see them through." I am not of course proposing to abandon them, but, I

shall have to see how much time and energy is absorbed by "the farm" as Bob rather grandly calls it, but I hope to have at least one day a week at Wallgate and to keep in touch with my many friends. One thing specially it struck me we mothers could when the whole nation is straining itself, and that is form a prayer unit. In St. Dominic's Priory, London, there is a continuous stream of lay-people reciting the Rosary, all day long. I wonder if we could do something similar in St. Joseph's? We could also meet together to help them keep the House clean, and make and get out the layette clothes, and needed clothing, etc.

Yours in Christ the Worker,

Molly Walsh.

P.S.—There is no doubt that the calls on us for material help during war time are fewer than in peace time. The reason for this is obvious. More people are working, and if it is not true now, it will be in a month or two, that everyone who is capable of work, will be working.

We are pledged to the service of the working classes, and we know they still need service. There are still many who need material help from us, though it is harder for us to discover them now. There are the wives of soldiers, men who were out of work before the war, there are old age pensioners, and those on P.A.C. allowances. There are the men who are no longer able to work, either through sickness or through having been too long unemployed to be able to start again. These people need our services, and your help.



Other letters were reaching me from Lancashire—from my children, now staying with my sister at Little Crosby. They told of how soldiers were quartered in the Fourteenth Century barn and in the house; and of how the family were there running a canteen for them. They were helping too, to grow more food in the kitchen garden. And then came the news of great preparations on foot for a three days' Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in the little Church to carry out the Triduum of prayer ordered by the hierarchy.

Material as well as spiritual preparations to receive the Invasion were everywhere afoot. All signs were removed that might show a parachutist where he was; places became "somewhere in England." A local news vendor who used proudly to paint over his shop "Mallinson's of Horley" substituted at this time the slogan "Mallinson's of Britain."

From church towers in Surrey and Sussex men who had worked in offices all day watched out at night for Germans. None knew where Hitler would strike: England: Scotland: even Ireland.

Shane Leslie wrote from Ireland to Father Fenlon of St. Mary's Seminary, Baltimore:

July 2, 1940

I have two letters of yours to answer but it is a relief to write to friends in another Continent with this Day of Judgment hanging over us all the time.

I must first tell you that last week we heard that Jack had been made prisoner and seen, though we have not heard officially from him. This gives us hope and enough spirit to work on and live on. But we endured a month of Purgatory when prayer was

like opening a wound! I cannot say how one suffers but I am sure that one's sins are burnt away. I am told that God has returned to almost every home in England. It is rather wonderful to think of all the spiritual forces which are rising, one hopes all over Europe if the Continent survives the famine which is upon her.

Ireland is very quiet but a prey to rumours. Everybody expects invasion but no one has an idea what would happen. I think the Germans would be as much puzzled as anyone. I think Dev has the situation very clear in mind and I don't think he will let the country down.

I have been here two months and am returning to London where Anita is nursing in a French hospital. Marjorie has been in St. Vincent's Hospital where the Sisters have buoyed up her hope and her faith. One's own private anxiety and grief is only a straw and I can only continue by assuring myself of my own unimportance and that death is natural and merited. What poor little ants we become in the Catastrophe.

## CHAPTER II

# The Attack on London

A LETTER to me from E. H. Connor, the business manager of Sheed & Ward, tells bluntly of the daily difficulties under which "a nation of shopkeepers" was labouring once the Blitz started:

8th October, 1940

I am sorry that you are disappointed not to receive news from me, but, quite apart from the fact that the Censor would not allow me to give any news in a letter other than that contained in the newspapers, in the circumstances in which I find myself I neither have the time nor the inclination to write news. Please do not think me rude, but I cannot believe that you realize the conditions under which we live and work. For the past month we have been lucky to get three or four hours sleep a night, we are constantly interrupted in our work by air raid alarms and added to this I am now attempting the impossible feat of conducting this business with a staff of five.\* I myself have to combine the functions of Trade Manager, Production Manager, Proof Reader, Advertising Manager, Traveller and act as my own Telephone Operator! If you can imagine after-office hours life as a scramble to get a meal and then adjourn to an air raid shelter (no lighting) for ten

\* Conscription and a war wedding had taken the rest.

hours, I think you will realize why I have written no chatty letters. I should not like you to think, however, that we are afraid; we are not. We only consider the whole business a damned nuisance, if I may say so.

What Mr. Connor thus rapidly summarises is described in brilliant detail by Shane Leslie in a letter written to his "Friends in Four Continents."

Mid-November, 1940

Life in London during the past two months has been more exciting than to have lived through a "cycle of Cathay." The evening cannonade has become London's dinner bell. The whole population hurries into shelter and basement, leaving Wardens and Guards, firemen and police to watch the night. Dinner one snatches at a canteen possibly waited on by a girl you saw going to Court in feathers two years ago. At eight I go on duty and settle down for the night amid telephones and send the despatch-riders to bed after a little fire-drill. Night can be wildly noisy, brilliant as Hell or stilly as Death. The droning of the Bombers, which we will hear in our dreams until life's end, is intermittent. Even more difficult to forget is the approach of a stick of bombs, each exploding a little closer until the last one overlaps and one feels like a fence the horses have passed without touching. But the Barrage will be a good memory. It is the strong beating of the Cockney heart.

There is a certain sinking of heart when the Black-out turns London into a darkened solitude. "Woe unto us for the day goeth away, for the shadows

of the evening are stretched out" said Jeremiah. The same Prophet might have seen an air raid when he wrote "suddenly are my tents spoiled and my curtains in a moment." I have seen so many torn curtains waving out of shattered windows. More often a Union Jack flutters over the path of a bomb.

Nights have been very wonderful in London. They are lived in the spirit of the Decameron when Plague and Death flourished in Florence and storytellers told of their best. Dinner parties are few and uncertain, but people have never been so amusing, nor raconteurs so brilliant. It may be their last display! When the bomb fell outside Claridge's at the dinner hour, no waiter dropped a plate and no diner dropped an item from his menu.

If one slumbers during the night the subconscious mind registers the fall of the bombs far or near. One wonders all the time what is going to happen and still more what one will do when it does happen. At dawn London sweeps up the glass and the clerks and typists hurry back to work noting with quaint contempt the scars of last night's raids. Despatch-riders become civilians and the Home Guard go to work. The officer on duty here is relieved by the Charwoman who has been twice bombed but still sticks to her work. For twenty-four hours she was a casualty but turned up limping after her husband had combed the glass out of her hair. She represents the London spirit and I have recommended her for honours.

The morning walk always recalls the Prophet Amos to me: "He will smite the great house with breaches and the little house with clefts." Some-

times the humour strikes one hard. I noticed a house through which a bomb had passed. A prophetic house-agent had once posted it to let "with Central Heating."

Londoners have made up their minds they are in the front trench. Fear and bewilderment have gone and they know they can stick it. A certain calculation occurs in their minds amounting to philosophy. They are satisfied to think that their homes are being shattered instead of military objectives. Middle-aged people are thankful they can collect in person the bombs that might have fallen upon the troops. Civilians feel they are fighting the good fight by sticking to their posts and daily tasks. Anonymously they stood up to the Blitz and many have found an anonymous grave. One day perhaps one of their number will be interred in Westminster Abbey as "an unknown civilian killed in the defence of London."

It is amazing how quickly windows are patched with wooden frames or brown paper, and the debris swept by a corps who call themselves Hitler's Bloody Housemaids! The plate-glass will disappear from shop life. Incendiary bombs leave blackish scars in the wooden pavement while the trace of oil-bombs requires sanding. The damage done has been a curious mixture of accurate shooting and random hitting. I am glad Hitler damaged his own property in Belgrave Square—the old Austrian Embassy. The night bombing reminds me of the desperate player who throws his stakes anywhere on the tables. I feel that since Mussolini challenged the Goddess Fortune by declaring war on the Principality of Monte Carlo, the chances will move against him.

Craters, craters everywhere but some have added bunkers to the golf course and others will remain as sunken gardens in suburban villas. There was a crater outside Apsley House with a car sticking out of it. The great Duke of Wellington had foresight in putting iron shutters over his windows. They have been as effective against the German blast as once against the English mob a hundred years ago.

Amusements have been generally closed and the ironical word **DIVERSION** appears on a yellow background at many street corners to guide the buses which thread a maze instead of their ordinary routes.

As for the famous Barrage which rises around London like the great Barrier Reef of Australia, it requires to be seen at a distance; a brilliant league-long geyser of white flame topped by bursts of distant shells. One night I watched the Achilles statue in the Park, iron-black against the sheeted flame, with the old warrior lifting his shield as though to ward off the falling shrapnel which you hear tinkling on slates or slicing branches at all hours of the night. God bless the great Barrage which has brought confidence if not repose to the sleepers of London!

At first the Barrage seemed a desperate expedient to worry and harass the raiders, but they bring them down now. It seemed like firing blind at snipe with a rifle in the dark, but with so many rifles firing, a snipe would be bound to be hit occasionally.

So London hard-hit and crumbling at the corners is not tumbling down. The debris of hundreds of unimportant and even condemned dwellings does not give the enemy a victory. The Cockney stays cock-a-hoop! Only once or twice did the night seem

to portend London's destruction, but such a City is not made of bricks and mortar, but of the souls of her inhabitants. The Spiritual City, the City of History and Memory will always spring up although every brick be broken and every stone ground to powder. It is only right that the toastmasters in the Empire should add to the health of the King and Queen and Royal Family, that of the People of London!

Another story comes from a Catholic stenographer to a friend who has given it to me:

The "blitz" hit us, at 2:30 in the morning. I had been sleeping in the office for some weeks previously, together with some of the girls and several of the men. On that particular night we were 19; some were asleep, including myself, while others were awake; the first I knew was the big bang, and I woke to find the place thick with dust and a sound of falling masonry and terrific cracklings. The firemen and watchmen soon collected everybody in the shelter from the various corners where they had been sleeping, and we then had to find a way out; at first it was thought that the whole place was on fire, as smoke was pouring down several staircases. We tried two or three exits before finding a staircase we could get up, though we found at the top that it was blocked, and made our way through a side doorway to the main banking floor, to be greeted with piles of masonry, broken furniture and such chaos as cannot be imagined; while close at hand a big fire was burning. I thought it was actually inside the building—but it developed that I was looking through a gaping



hole in our wall at what was a building next door. Our wall, some 4 or 5 feet thick, was completely blown in, all falling on top of the shelter where we were sleeping, but all that happened to the shelter was a slight crack in one wall. It was well built to withstand that blast. To continue, we climbed over the debris and got out the front door; all the elaborate boarding covering the big windows on the ground floor was blown away; we got into the street, which was illuminated with a brilliant moon, a red glow from surrounding fires over everything, a bomber overhead, and underfoot tons of broken glass. I was wearing soft-soled bedroom slippers, no coat or hat, but fortunately had on all my underclothing and a woolen dress, which I had slept in. I had the sense to gather up a couple of rugs off my bed as we left the shelter; water was pouring in at the time, and perhaps I had an idea the bedding would get wet! Funny things one does in such circumstances. Some of the others took blankets too after I had mentioned it. Another thing I did was to put my pillows in the box kept for the purpose! We eventually got through the streets to a nearby tube station, in spite of the bomber which dropped another land-mine as we were going along, but it didn't explode immediately, as ours did. These heavy calibre bombs come down on parachutes sometimes, and one doesn't hear them swishing down like the other bombs the brutes use.

However, we reached the tube station and were met by the wardens and conducted to the First Aid post there, after walking around thousands of sleeping or prostrate forms sheltered along the corridors

and passages of the tube station. None of us had a single scratch, but we did want to drink, as the dust had us a bit dry in the throat. In spite of my bedroom slippers, I had only a small piece of glass sticking in them, but no cuts anywhere; we were all very calm and collected, but an amazing looking lot of refugees.

I don't know to whom thanks are due for this miraculous escape, but I feel sure that the Sacred Heart and the Blessed Virgin Mary had something to do with it, not to mention my little Miraculous Medal, which I always wear; and too, no doubt thanks are due to all my friends over there who have been praying for my safety, and to mother who is always watching over us. . . .

It is not surprising that nuns should be among the heroines of this war as most certainly they are—both teaching and nursing orders.

In and around London the Sacred Heart Order has four convents, Hammersmith and St. Charles's Square in Westminster north of the Thames and Westhill and Roehampton in Southwark south of the Thames. Roehampton is almost in the country and close to the Jesuit novitiate at Manresa. The story of the damage done to two of these convents and the courage of the nuns came to me in a letter from one of the nuns who was herself present, but a yet better description was compiled for the Roehampton Association from the accounts of various eye-witnesses. The picture of Mother Rice in a tin hat sitting on a fire engine is peculiarly pleasing! The Mother Shepherd mentioned in the account is the sister of Eric Shepherd, the author of "Murder in a Nunnery."

In the first place we may well thank Our Lord for having preserved all so wonderfully, not a scratch on a nun, a guest, nor on the firemen.

The first attack was on the night of Sunday, Sept. 22nd-23rd, when three high explosive bombs and one oil bomb fell in the polo field just behind Calvary and blasted over 200 panes of glass along the north and west of the house. The next day, Mother Shepherd and four novices went to Craiglockhart, where the most generous and loving hospitality awaited them; long distance and even "toll" calls were impossible; they had just "to go" . . . On Wednesday night, shortly after midnight, a message came from the nuns watching on the roof, to those who were resting in the cellars, to say that there was a fire. All who could went up at once and found incendiary bombs blazing just above St. Philomena's (i.e. on the printing loft roof) and also on the Jubilee Wing dormitory roof. By the time Reverend Mother got to the printing loft, Sister Horwood had already extinguished the fire there, so she went on to the Jubilee Wing dormitory. Minimax and water were brought, but the flames had gained too much. Firemen were again telephoned for and another Minimax fetched from St. Michael's Corridor (soon to be non-existent). Meanwhile guns banged overhead. The nuns groped along the wall below and brought in from the garden the 100-yard hose; with great trouble having got it in, a nurse who was kindly helping took hold of the wrong end and went upstairs, regardless of the cries behind to "Stop!" Quite useless, it was only in everyone's way. At last the men came; the blaze in the printing loft was found to

have rekindled, but the Jubilee Wing seemed worse. The nuns had finally to leave it when the roof caved in, just before the men arrived. At the other end of the School Corridor a crash was heard and, at the foot of the Vestibule Stairs, another crash, and the cry "No one may go up." Furniture was taken from the parlours, bedding and other things rescued from the cellars, which began to fill with smoke and water. Jesuit Juniors from Manresa, in tin hats, worked like blacks, bringing trunks and all they could carry to the yard. The firemen said that planes were overhead, the nuns then crossed the road between the fire engines, along the wall out of reach of shrapnel to Queen Mary's Hospital, where they were most graciously received, though nine incendiary bombs had dropped in *their* grounds. All, including the Matron, were most kind, providing the nuns with beds or arm chairs, the nurses serving cups of hot tea. The Hospital Ward was an Army Hut and many realised that between them and the planes above was just a thin roof, but God protected them. The big guns came on again. All prayed silently, while the "zoom—zoom," now so familiar, boomed overhead. Mrs. Gilbertson, the mother of two little girls at Stanford, who had gone to Manresa for the nuns and returned to render many services, came also to the Hospital. During a lull she attempted to reach home; the guns began again and she had to lie flat on her face once or twice. At 6 a.m. about twelve nuns returned to prepare for Mass. The great anxiety had been the safety of the Chapel, but of this the firemen had been able to assure the nuns, though sheets of water reached nearly to the Sanc-

tuary. At 7.15, Father Parsons, who had taken the Blessed Sacrament to safety at midnight, returned and offered a Mass of Thanksgiving for the preservation of life and all the kindness received. The telephone had "gone," so we could communicate with no one, but the next day the invalid nuns were sent where temporary hospitality was offered. Reverend Mother and a small community remain in the guest house. Through the grace of God no one had been frightened; old and young, ill or well, all were perfectly calm and collected; those who could work did so; those who could not, kept quiet, prayed and even slept.

With the daylight on Thursday, 26th, it was possible to realise the havoc of the night. The first floor of the Old House, the Community rooms and Reverend Mother's room are a mass of ashes and wreckage; valuables of all kind, books of reference and precious Archives in great part have been destroyed. A picture of our venerated Reverend Mother Digby, protected by the invocation "Cease, the Heart of Jesus is with me," remains, and the greater part of the room committed to her special care was untouched by the fire. The beautiful Oratory, presented by her mother, Mrs. Digby Boycott, is a total wreck of charred wood and ashes, the precious oak reliquary and statues entirely destroyed; some few relics have been rescued. The printing loft has fallen through on to the community floor, though fortunately the heavy machinery had been taken to pieces and stored in the gymnasium some weeks ago. The Noviceship Wing is untouched, likewise the Upper Cloister. There were incendiary bombs on the Im-

maculate Conception rooms and the damage there is considerable. St. Michael's Corridor, the school linen room and lofts, have fallen into the dormitory and corridor below.

St. Aloysius dormitory, the play room and part of the Junior School dormitory fell into the beautiful refectory, which is seriously damaged; the panelling can be saved, however. The statue of Our Lady of Aberdeen stood serene in the vestibule, which has escaped damage; it was removed on Friday. Our Lady of Lourdes and the beautiful Pieta also are unharmed and the Chapel of Mater Admirabilis still remains. In the parlours, except for water, little damage has been done; only two pictures are lost, the quasi-Rubens in the School refectory and a painting by Mme Arendrupp. Over 150 firemen were engaged in the salvage work, forty or more engines and a two-mile hose. Mother Rice, in a tin hat, sat in a fire engine directing the men through gates and garden. The clock face remains, the hands pointing the hour 1.35 a.m. The bells have fallen, but the men hoisted the Union Jack on the highest point of the ruins and it blew there all day on Thursday, 26th.

"And they died, but the Flag of England blew free ere the spirit passed." (*Kipling.*)

A further disaster befell Roehampton on Friday, October 11th, at 7 p.m. Once more the nuns, now reduced in number to eleven, were preserved from any injury. After dropping parachute flares of many colours, which made the scene as light as day, the Nazi airmen showered down innumerable incendiaries and loosed bombs and high explosives into the flames. The roof of the Chapel was

burnt; mercifully the altar and reredos, as well as the stained glass windows, escaped; the stalls were saved and part of the ornamental ceiling is unharmed. Reverend Mother carried the Blessed Sacrament to safety.

The Mrs. Gilbertson mentioned in the above account sent the Roehampton Association the following:

About 1 a.m. on the morning of September 26th I received a telephone call from the Convent: "Manresa line out of order. We are ablaze. Can you get a priest to remove the Blessed Sacrament." I ran like the wind, so did their Chaplain, followed by numerous students, who afterwards did gallant work in helping to save any and everything that came within reach. The whole place, with the exception of the laundry and the Great House, appeared in peril. There was one cry, "Save the Chapel." Whilst the men worked with their network of hose, additional water was pumped up from the lake, which I understand was one of their vital assets. We went to the Chapel, the large Monstrance was put in my arms, likewise other Sacred Vessels, but the load became too heavy, so we spread a rug on the ground and dragged them to the door, and they were eventually removed to Queen Mary's Hospital, where we were all sent, on the command, "Everyone to leave the building, they are going to bomb us." We had a warm welcome at the hospital; they cleared their casualty ward for us and gave us all beds and a hot beaker of tea, in spite of having had fires themselves.

The "All Clear" sounded at 5.30 a.m. Confronted with a mass of wreckage and burnt debris, inches of water everywhere, daylight showing through the

roofs, a dormitory fallen into the refectory, an indescribable mess everywhere, the great work of cleaning up began, and now, brick by brick, we must all help in the rebuilding which will eventually replace the ruin caused by this unexpected disaster.

The Hampstead area suffered most heavily in the earlier raids. An old aunt of mine was living there, *very* old and long in her dotage, nursed by two sisters of the Bon Secours. In my absence, I had asked Dorothy Collins, secretary and adopted daughter of the Chestertons to look after her. An early letter from one of the nuns tells what life had become in their small apartment.

19/9/40

Dear Miss Collins:

Thanks ever so much for your good prayers, I can assure you at times we need them. It has been dreadful for over three weeks, it is very nerve racking to hear the planes going over your head from 8 P.M. until about 5 A.M. and hearing the thud of the bombs dropping. So far the Sacred Heart has protected us for we have had lots of bombs dropped around Hampstead and Kilburn. On Sunday night we heard two screaming bombs pass over the flat and then a loud explosion, we all thought the plane had dropped on the roof it shook the flat so much, but next morning we found it was Kilburn High Rd., including Evans' big shop, quite near the Church of the Sacred Heart. It had a miraculous escape. When we went to Mass next morning we found the Church thick with soot and dust. Upper Park Rd., where our convent is, was bombed last week, there were 8



people residing there but all had gone into a shelter for the night, except an old Lady over 80 and she was killed; all the houses in the road including the Convent had their windows smashed and in the next road they dropped several time bombs and all had to be evacuated. The Priory had several windows smashed and the roof of one of the Father's rooms fell in and covered the Father with debris. We go to bed every night half dressed in case we have to get up quickly. I have now put my bed in the Hall and Sister and I rest on it together, not very comfortable but better than running in and out as soon as we hear the planes nearing. Mrs. Gibbons rests in an arm chair with her feet raised on another chair and that is the way we live these days. Please God we shall soon be freed from this terrible scourge and that we shall be the better for it. I have great trust in the Sacred Heart and pray day and night to Him for protection. I must say we all feel safer since we had the guns, they make a terrific row especially when the plane is nearing you but nobody seems to mind the noise. I often think of you in the night when we hear the Ambulance passing and wonder if you are being called out. I should think you have a very dangerous work to do. Please God you will be kept safe. I shall be pleased to see you anytime you can find time to come, you will always be welcome. With kindest regards and many prayers for your kindness to us.

Yours Very Affectionately in Jesus Christ,

SR. ALOYSIA

Many observers have noticed how the raiders seem to

return again and again to the same spots. It was so with Roehampton. It was so with the Bon Secours Convent, and in more tragic fashion.

Dorothy Collins sleeps at her fire station three nights a week in Beaconsfield. They make the ambulance stretchers into improvised beds. She also works vigorously at her garden, looks after evacuees and between whiles gets over to Sussex to work for a few days for Mr. Belloc. She wrote to me on November 9th:

Top Meadow Cottage  
Beaconsfield,  
Bucks.

I had seen the nuns from time to time and they seemed to be standing the air-raids well. I fixed up for your aunt to go to a nursing home at Wokingham run by our Beaconsfield Bon Secours sisters; also some one had offered them a cottage at Luton which their Sister Superior turned down as it seemed to be a danger area. I was sorry about this as nothing could have been as bad as London. They did not think she could possibly go to a nursing home and I think they had a very strong feeling that they wanted to keep together with their nice maid and the cat. Then came the awful tragedy one Sunday night when their convent was blown to pieces and the four nuns in it killed, including the old one who used to be with your aunt when you first left England. She had been moved back to the convent as she was so frightened at your Aunt's house, and a very charming young French nun had been sent in her place.

Sister Aloysia had a dreadful time as she was the only person to identify remains of the sisters and

their possessions. They were literally blown to pieces. . . .

They are now in Liverpool. It is not safe there, but it is nothing like London—and nowhere in England is safe. We have had bombs all around us here, but so far none actually in the centre of Beaconsfield. I can't think why as they have had them at the Chalfonts, Jordans, Hedgerley and other much smaller places all round us. My parents had a landmine a mile from them which destroyed one hundred and twenty houses in the village and killed eight people.

The bombing has been continuous and devastating in London. I work in the Public Assistance Hall here where we take in people who have come out of London with nowhere to go. The morale is surprisingly high. The constant shelter life with herding and all the unpleasantness which result from it is what is getting the people down. There is hardly anything left of the East End. It is a judgment on the nation that we have allowed the East End conditions to go on so long that enemy action has been used as the instrument of clearing those slums. How true is the remark made by Claudel, "God writes straight with crooked lines."

My garden has given me great returns for all my labours, which never seem to cease. I have bought no vegetables since June, having had crops which seem fantastic for such a small piece of ground; 65 lbs. of runner beans, 100 lbs. of early potatoes in addition to the later ones which I have not yet weighed etc. etc.

A garden is a comfort to a garden-lover and a help to

the country, but no garden will induce a real Londoner to quit.

"I have been meaning to ask you to tea" wrote an octogenarian cousin "and now my poor house is bombed and I have had to come here". "Here" was a Kensington hotel a few hundred yards away from the "poor house".

And an East-end slum dweller answered attempts to evacuate her with "I goes to bed 'opeful and I gets up thankful".

Nor is it merely love of London that holds them: behind refusals to evacuate can often be found a motive of love: for in almost all families are some whose duty keeps them there, and the others will not leave them.

Let one more story of London heroines be told in the words of Father Vincent McNabb whose Priory stands close to the bombed convent of the Bon Secours. Do not let the coincidence of Christian names cause you to confuse either of his heroines with Dorothy Collins, whose letter you have just been reading.

Some few days after the Blitzkrieg began to terrorize London nights a young married officer wrote asking if he could come to consult me on an urgent matter.

When he came he went with military directness to his objective: "Father, the matter I cannot make up my mind about is this. We are likely to be in for a bad time. As you know Dorothy has already two little ones and, as you do not know, she is expecting a third soon. Now do you think I ought to send Dorothy and the children to Canada?"

We both knelt down and said a prayer for light to the Holy Ghost who, in all tight corners, and espe-

cially in home tight corners, has His own method of showing the way out.

When we rose from our knees I said, as the immediate result of our personal application to the third Person of the Blessed Trinity: "What does Dorothy want to do?"

Now I was prepared to hear what quite a number of timid Dorothies—and I, if I were a Dorothy—should want to do, viz. go off to Canada by the first boat. So that I was not quite prepared to hear him say emphatically: "Oh! of course, Dorothy wants to stay with me".

There was no tone of boastfulness or pride that I could detect in what he said. He seemed to be saying something quite obvious like "two and two make four".

I could only play up to him by saying something equally obvious. So without studying the conventions of speech I said: "Well, if Dorothy wants to stay, don't you think that settles the matter?"

His emotion on hearing this question-answer of mine was such that I should not have been surprised had he embraced me. He stammered out an "Oh, thank you!" and was in his runabout motor car before I could ask after Dorothy. I am not sure that it was not the shortest interview I ever had on a matter of such importance.

If this war story ended here it would be a story worth telling, if only to steady the national nerves. But it does not end here, with the abrupt satisfaction of a husband who hesitated between his duty and his love towards his wife. The end of the story is still more nerve-steadying, and is wholly the wife's.

A few days after Dorothy's husband went out from me with a great content in his heart I received my first letter from Dorothy—the mother of two and the expectant mother of a third. It was a classic of thanksgiving. Its writer almost exhausted the vocabulary of gratitude. Had it fallen into the hands of a stranger, it would have seemed to record some munificent gift made by me to Dorothy and to Dorothy's good man. Yet I was given the honour due to a Daniel who was also a Maecenas; when, in fact, I was allowing a young expectant mother and loving wife to stay in a war zone from which thousands of her fellow countrywomen (and not a few of her fellow countrymen) were fleeing.

The tale of the second Dorothy is like the first a record of the quiet heroism of a wife and mother. But in lesser details it is unlike; so that the two stories become one great epic of the brave women whom brave men will risk their lives to defend.

Dorothy II is the mother of one child under two and the expectant mother of a second. Dorothy II's husband is a Private in His Majesty's forces. Straight and swift as a homing-pigeon, he is always at her side whenever he gets leave—and sometimes when it is not got, but taken.

One night when (with or without leave I cannot say) he was at home a woman friend who was staying the night said to Dorothy II: "How are you feeling?"

"Fine", said, and nodded, Dorothy II.

"God is looking after you", said her friend from an anxious, motherly heart.

"Umph", muttered nodding, smiling Dorothy II.

It was the Sunday night when Nazi planes did such

harm and killed so many London folk that some kind of effective barrage had to be organized. Locally it meant destruction and deaths. The Priory where I am now writing was strewn with broken glass.

As the house where Dorothy II was living lay half-way between the landfalls of the two bombs that wrought such havoc it was soon without windows and was rocking as if it would soon be without standing walls. To dull the noise of the guns and of the enemy planes, and to give her little under-two a chance of sleeping, Dorothy II had covered it with an eiderdown, and it slept.

Dorothy II was lying on the side of the bed next the window, which suddenly began to pour out a flood of splintered glass. Instinctively, the loving wife, catching what she could of the bed clothes, tried to cover her husband. But—

Instinctively, the loving husband, catching what he could of the bed clothes, tried to cover his wife. Their hands and their handfulls met over the precious thing that slept under its eiderdown.

Then they heard footsteps treading down the crackling broken glass. The door was opened almost violently and the father of Dorothy II stood pale-faced in the half-light of the early dawn. He was beginning to ask if she and her babe and her husband were unhurt. . . .

But, in the half-light, he saw his little mother-daughter put her finger to her lips, and he heard her whisper—"Hush! baby is asleep!"

I think I had better end these two epics of our people by a third story of the mother of one of those airmen whom the world is now recognizing as heroes of

the air. One night, before taking leave of his mother, perhaps never to return, he heard her for the thousandth time pray God to keep him safe in the dangers he ran each time he went out against the enemy.

But, bending down, with a smile he kissed her and said quite simply, "Darling mother, we are defending you".

And whilst mothers like the two Dorothies are to be found in these islands, the sons and brothers and husbands of these mothers will think these islands worth any death-risks to defend.



### CHAPTER III

## Heroism Becomes a Habit

TO ANYONE who visits England at this moment or who is thinking from a distance of the people there, the war occupies the center of the stage. But with the English themselves for the most part, this is not so. For them, the war is more like the weather: something that affects them, indeed, that has to be constantly taken into account, but to be fitted into the framework of life: certainly not to dominate it.

Although not hit as hard as London, all southern England is, as a friend wrote me, "in the front line." This friend has a vast house near the sea coast where a convent school was for a time evacuated. But at the time she wrote, the children had been moved again, seventy-six high explosives having fallen on her estate, a wood having been set on fire and a farm machine-gunned by dive bombers.

A letter from my daughter Rosemary's school mistress in Horley shows how our village was—and is—taking it.

St. Hilda's School  
Somewhere in  
England! undated, but  
written in October

Dear Rosemary:

. . . . . another piece of school news I have to tell  
is very sad, and at the same time a cause for rejoicing.

St Hilda's has its first little Saint. Ann Metcalf had meningitis and died. I was able to have her baptised a Catholic before she died. She was unconscious the whole time in hospital except when Father baptised her (she was not baptised as a baby) and she held the candle and said the little prayer Father asked her to say. We always think of her as our little protector against bombs, and feel sure that St. Hilda's will be remembered before the throne of God. Ann was also my first Godchild. Her Mother is now receiving instructions.

J. has not been to school this term. She heard a bomb fall somewhere in the holidays, and apparently she has not yet recovered sufficiently to return to the fold. I see her in the town and at the pictures sometimes.

In the beginning of September we used to dash into the shelter every time the siren went—three or four times a day. Everyone loved it. We were all bursting with ideas of games to play, songs to sing, etc. After a week of it, we had played all the games in our repertoire until we hated everyone of them—we'd sung ourselves hoarse—and even lessons seemed preferable. Thereupon we abandoned the shelter and carried on in class unless something came near, in which case we all simply fell downstairs into the shelter, only to find that kindergarten was there before us, having moved even more rapidly.

It was very amusing one evening. The sirens had gone but we ignored them as usual. Miss James was having a bath and I was removing a little dust from the Hall. I heard lots of planes so I strolled upstairs and advised Miss James not to linger too long, and

then I proceeded happily downstairs to see if the boarders were happy in the shelter. Suddenly bang—bang—bang—right overhead! The song died on my lips and I took the rest of the stairs in a stride, flew for the shelter, hoping Miss James would be all right. I just fell into the shelter and something hurtled on top of me. It was Miss James. I still can't imagine how she did it! By this time it was all over! We rejoiced to learn that the banging was the gun of a British plane and that the German plane was brought down.

It's rather amazing how air raids cease to worry one. The mere sound of the siren was enough to make my knees knock at the beginning of the war. Now the siren has no more effect than a motor-horn, and a good loud bang is greeted by such remarks as, "Do you think that was a gun or a bomb?" whereupon everyone has a different opinion. Sometimes even:

"Was that someone at the door?"

"No, I think it was a bomb."

That's quite true. I heard the remark myself. You would not think it possible to think such a thing—but it is, after a while.

I have omitted from this letter quite a catalogue of minor school incidents, a list of the books being read and all a teacher's ardent hopes that her old pupil is continuing to read and think and doing credit in her new school to the teaching in her old one. Nothing is more surprising in all the letters than the proportion between the war and the rest. Several letters from Rosemary's schoolfellows make no mention of the war except such

sentences as "I think the Jerries are just coming, so I will close," and "We are now going to have a cup of cocoa before the blitzers come, that is, if they do."

My husband told me that when he stayed at a friend's house, the blast from a bomb blew his hostess into his arms and the whole family laughed helplessly. Like the weather, the "blitzer" has become a factor of daily life.

"I went past your house," wrote one child to Rosemary, "and I saw all the windows pasted up. Our windows are pasted up also. I liked them like it. I mean by pasted up stuck all over with bits of paper."

This is done to prevent splinters when a house is struck or if a bomb falls near. Our house received such damage fairly early and a friend wrote that "a first aid repair" had been carried out.

A ten year old schoolfellow wrote to my son:

Dear Wilfrid

I am very sorry I have not written to you before, but I have been to so many places bomb dodging and I could not find out your address as I did not take it to the country with me. It has been very noisy at Horley since you left. The first attack was made one Thursday we were all playing in the garden when about 50 planes came out of the sky but our defences were ready for them the spitfires and AA guns gave them what they deserve and four planes were shot down in Horley. If you had been up that fir tree the other night you would have heard a whiz bang and found yourself going through the air to goodness knows where, as a bomb fell at the little gate. Thank you very much for the nice letter you sent me I was very glad you got to America

safely it must have been a marvelous experience. I have left St Hilary's School now and am now going to a school in Wantage where we are now staying. It is not a very nice place as there is only one shop and that has got nothing in. I miss you very much espaisaly in wantage as I have not got many friends down there. Peter is getting married next month Well I have nothing more to say only to wish you the best of health and happyness Goodbye

Your Friend

Norman

P.S. There has been about 1000 bombs dropped in Horley but only one man killed

P.S.S. The Gang's getting on fine and send there love.

In one letter I find a reference to Father Barry as the "little priest who succeeded Father Healy." Father Healy was tall and handsome with obvious personality while Father Barry at first sight suggested such adjectives as shy, retiring, quiet and gentle. It was only gradually that one discovered his delicate sense of humour and his profound goodness.

Looking back at Horley days, I see Father Barry not as one of those heroes created by the war, but as having had always a fund of hidden heroism. Young and delicate, he was always working beyond his strength. He lived at Wandsworth in one of the orphanages of the Southwark Rescue Society. Thence after Mass and breakfast, he would travel to the Society's office in South London for a hard day's secretarial work. On Saturday afternoon, he came to Horley for a crushing week-end's work. He somehow managed to squeeze into a day and a half what a

resident priest would have been able to spread over the whole week, covering an area of many square miles on a bicycle which during the week he left in the sacristy with a standing order that it might be borrowed by any member of the congregation who needed it.

It had always been the custom for our priest to come into the house at mid-day and eat his roastbeef with us. (No one in England ever gets tired of roastbeef on Sundays: it is to us what turkey is to an American.) But on very many Sundays Father Barry would excuse himself with a "previous engagement".

Presently we discovered that it was in the cottage of one or another of our very poorest Catholics that he was eating his Sunday dinner. I am sure they gave him something much better than the potato which was all the Curé d'Ars would accept, but it was of the Curé that Father Barry reminded me. He had all his gentleness and patience and I have never in all my life received such exquisite gratitude for such very slight reasons as from this priest of ours. It still makes me happy to think that after we left he wrote to my sister "I miss them more than I can say."

He was in the orphanage at Wandsworth for the worst of the raids and was killed carrying the children's bedding down to the basement.

The first thing he did in Heaven was to persuade the Bishop to send to our Church of the English Martyrs at Horley the resident priest we had been praying for these ten years. And my husband was back there to serve the first Mass.

From another village a little north of London a friend wrote on October 12:

For weeks now I have had a letter for you in my

pen, but I never get to writing it down. The house is so full of people, doorbells, and telephones, that the day is finished before it has begun.

I hope that you have received my telegram. You mustn't worry about us. It is a stormy time, but after all we aren't any closer to death than any other time. It is only that we are reminded of it more frequently. Miss Warrender was just saying that this morning, and I think it is a wonderful philosophy. We are calm and live up to the 100% mark more easily than in normal times. I have taken all the precautions for safety, but there isn't a single spot that is certain to be safe. We don't run into danger on purpose, though it might be easier to rush wildly into Red Cross and other work that would provide an outlet and a remedy for tension and anxiety but that isn't A.M.D.G! [to the greater glory of God]. You must not believe all the news from London. It is not so bad; of course you won't ever see many of the famous spots again; but in comparison to other places nothing has happened yet.

We just had a bomb fall next door—into a chicken coop with 200 chickens, and the “fried” chickens were blown over into our garden, into the pen, really!—I almost said into the soup, but that wasn't so!

Honestly it's not so bad—even the damage, though it is naturally something extraordinary and no joke. But when you think that now thousands of people are turning toward God, you rejoice for Our Lord, and you can only see it as an expression of His love for mankind. Our Lady of Victories is burnt out, Highgate the same, Farm Street has been visited

three times. But I think that such things can be fixed up all right later. It doesn't cost human lives. So don't weep about it. We live, and that is marvelous. Every sunbeam is a glorious gift now.

The same refusal to be stampeded by the Blitz is in two long letters received by our great friend Mgr Hawks of Philadelphia from his brother in Bristol:

First letter (in two sections)

November 18th 1940

My dear Edward,

. . . . . We have been very fortunate here. The destruction at Coventry, which we can now mention as it has been disclosed, makes us wonder for the future. That was on Thursday last. It was a beautiful moon-light night. I anticipated trouble and did not go to bed. I don't go down in the basement floor, it's too cold. You have to take a chance anyway and it's very extraordinary how you get used to things. I sat by my fire and dozed. I was awakened about every hour with planes passing over to the Midlands in relays. They fly very high but you judge whether it is a single or two planes by the noise of the engine. Going and coming back they went on from about ten to four, and our barrage went "all out" for them on each occasion.

November 19th

I had to make a break here because there was a lot of planes and firing, and on going down stairs to see if anyone was in, found the gentleman in the ground floor apartment was alone as his wife had



gone to the pictures!!! I sat and talked to him. Tonight I have been to a lecture at the Museum given by one of General de Gaulle's officers. He was very careful in his remarks but very confident that the Colonial Empire would be saved. An old friend of mine who lives at Henleaze was there and he came back with me for a short chat. He has just left. I wanted him to stay a little while as there are more planes over—I can hear them now and our guns are blasting away. It's a great sight to watch. The search-lights are going and the sky is lit up with shell blasts. You would not believe it, but there is a car parking place outside our house and people are now coming out of a local cinema and are driving away in their cars with Jerry overhead. The other night I was awakened by two spells of tremendous gunfire—a battery going off all together and one could hear the shell splinters dropping on the roofs of the Restaurant behind my house. . . . Blast these planes. I expect I shall have to go downstairs. It sounds as if a bomb had been dropped just then—but you can't tell at the top of the house. In the basement you feel the earth tremors when bombs are dropped.

Another letter dated November 29th.

You will have heard on the Wireless that we had a visitation on Sunday night and I sent you a cable to let you know that I was safe. Jerry has apparently started his raids for destruction regardless of military objectives, and until we have overcome the Night Raid danger most of our cities will have their share. London of course has had a bad time but it is a vast area, but in our case we are an ancient city very

congested with narrow streets. I have to be careful because of censorship. I believe, however, that in the reports broadcasted to America, which no doubt you heard, certain landmarks and buildings were referred to, and as many of them are on my doorstep I thought you would be anxious—hence my cable. By my previous letters no doubt you thought we were getting so used to the sirens and “all clears” that we were casual of danger and I think that is true. We could never do our work or enjoy any peace of mind if we allowed these daily warnings to worry us. I have just been reading an article in your Catholic Standard and Times by George Barnard in the issue of November 1st. It is well written and gives a very true picture of the feelings of all in the country. Sunday, however, I had a presentiment that we should have a big raid. It was a night just fitted for it. I hadn't been down in the basement for over a month and had gone to bed at my usual time. If any firing started, I used to put out my lights and look behind my “black-out” to see the direction of the searchlights. Usually the planes have been passing to other directions. On Sunday, however, at the first gunfire, I put out my gas fire and went to the window. I saw big flares on parachutes come down lighting up everything like daylight. I knew then that we were in for it. I rushed down to warn all occupants of the other apartments. We had hardly got into the Hall of the basement before it commenced. It was 6.30 in the evening. The little boy of the caretaker in the basement was, I am glad to say, out of Bristol, but the young couple below me had a baby in arms, and a little tot of three and a nurse maid. The

ground floor married couple have no children. We had five hours of it. The noise was terrific. Our guns never ceased. We put the women on the stair-case with plenty of blankets and rugs over their heads, and when we heard bombs whistling, down we lay on the floor and covered our heads till we heard the explosions. Jerry must have dropped thousands of small incendiary bombs. We could hear them falling like hail. I take my hat off to the Air Wardens—all voluntary workers—their only protection a steel helmet and over-alls. The Warden in our district looked in from time to time. Buildings were flaming all around us. At the end of the fourth hour we decided to evacuate the house and go to the surface shelter in the roadway. You will wonder why we hadn't gone there before. These surface shelters are intended for people caught in the streets and most of us would rather stay in our houses if possible. Underground shelters are all right, but we don't fancy surface shelters. We all managed to get across the road although the sparks and debris were falling in sheets. I stood at the entrance of the shelter to watch our houses. It seemed impossible that they would not catch alight. I struck a match to light my pipe and an Air Warden shouted out "put out that light". Rather funny. As the whole sky was lighted his remark seemed unnecessary. I then thought that I had better make a dash up to my apartment to see whether there were any incendiaries through the roof. I found everything all right. I discovered that the fire at the back was not in the shops behind our house but on the other side of the road. This was very comforting. One of the buildings of the school

opposite the front of our house was well alight, and as you have heard on the wireless, the Museum Great Hall of the University was all ablaze. The single house on my corner next to the Museum was already burnt to the ground floor. At half past eleven it ceased. Our houses are all well-built and not a roof or a window in anyone of them was damaged or broken. Perfectly amazing. We didn't go to bed but slept in the basement. We found that gas and water had gone, and we were without them for two days. I went to business early in the morning to see if our plant still existed. I went my usual way down our beautiful . . . street. The sight was appalling. We cannot go directly to the city because of unexploded bombs and dangerous masonry. I found the office intact. One window broken in my private office. That was all. Now, I suppose I must give you no more details because they have not been made public. I am glad some of our American friends saw the ancient parts of Bristol because they will never see many of them again. St Mary Redcliffe not touched—thank God. No strictly military objectives were hit, and the loss of life and casualties for the damages inflicted are unbelievably small. Two famous churches gutted, three modern churches gutted, the principal theatre gutted—but none of our Catholic churches here, as far as I know, have been touched. Our Catholic Home for aged people, close to our house, was badly hit. I could write you pages but it is impossible to know everything yet as huge portions of the town are barricaded off. Well, this destruction won't win the war for Germany. What has civilization come to? Who would have thought that we should live to

see these conditions? It seems impossible. I have always thought myself a coward, but without boasting I have never once felt fear during these events. The little nurse maid in the apartment below is an Irish Catholic. She was splendid. I said to her afterwards: "I suppose, Nancy, you were praying hard." She said: "I hoped that you were, Mr. Hawks, as I could not concentrate my thoughts." The child of three kept the women from worrying. She never showed the slightest fear, or cried once. She was clapping her hands and saying "More bombs—more guns—more noise".

Everybody in the house has been very kind to me. You have to be very neighborly under these conditions. We are tremendously thankful in this house that we have our lives and property. Many have lost their all. Right at hand we have this example. The lady whose house at our corner was burnt had been out to visit her aged mother and invalided sister. The house took fire where she was visiting and they were rescued and taken to a neighbor's house. Everything was burnt. She thought that anyhow she had her own house to return to—only to find that it had also been burnt. The mother and two sisters have lost everything, even to the clothes which they wore, for in the rescue these were torn to tatters.

One of the wardens told me that they had put out\* incendiary bombs in our road alone. Not one pierced a roof. It seems like a miracle.

Harry Hawks

\* The number of the incendiary bombs was carefully cut out by the censor.

Many fascinating letters, from Convents especially, reached me too late for inclusion: it may well be that later a fresh book could be made of them. The letters from the Holy Child nuns are entirely delightful with their record of energy and quiet heroism—nuns, evacuated with groups of children, sleeping two in a bed and praying under the difficulty of only a fortnightly mass; novices helping farmers with their haymaking as labour is scarce; bombs falling close at hand; daily thanksgiving for the day's safety and a great devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows.

From the lovely old Convent at Mayfield Sussex, with its mediaeval ruins now threatened by more than time, I quote two letters:

Mayfield Sept. 6th 1940

Perhaps you would like to hear exactly what happens in a raid. It begins with a warning. Sirens sound first feebly from distant points then nearer and louder. They howl up and down like banshees or as a writer in the Times wittily quoted "like a woman wailing for her demon lover." Then we hear a faint but unmistakable thug—thug—thug—thug, which is German Planes, growing louder every moment, as they approach. The children and the maids are shepherded off to their respective shelters when the noise grows louder. The nuns have their various stations and duties—some are responsible for filling the baths with water in case of fire—others watch for incendiary bombs, some go to keep company with our invalids, and two put on tin hats and patrol the grounds. If the battle comes near us a whistle is blown and the nuns also repair to our shelter.

Another instance of God's Providence is the children's shelter, which is under the Concert-Hall. It was constructed merely as a useful passage to the stage, but it might have been designed for its present use. It is underground, concrete-roofed, windowless, and with an exit at each end. It has heating pipes, electric light, water and a lavatory and it passes all the government requirements for an Air-Raid shelter. Is that not wonderful? It is, too, just large enough to shelter the whole school. Each child has her own chair, on which she keeps her gas-mask. A call-card for each class hangs up in the proper place and the Head of each class is responsible for calling the names and seeing that all are present. The whole school with the Prefects and the matron can be down there three minutes after they are awakened by the whistle. Each child puts on her dressing gown and shoes, throws her stockings round her neck, seizes her eiderdown and takes the appointed route. No running is allowed, as it is apt to induce panic, but all hold hands and know exactly what to do. The passage can be made gas-proof in a few moments by special fittings which stand ready in position. It is, of course, rather hot and stuffy, but that cannot be helped. Books and chocolate are provided for the children, but if the raids continue to be frequent, arrangements will be made for them to lie down at once, and if possible go to sleep.

Our Bishop has given a dispensation, allowing us to receive Holy Communion after having taken liquid nourishment in cases of Air-Raids, and this is a great help.

2.30 P.M. The "All-Clear" has just sounded for

the Raid which began at 1 P.M. The Nazis are very persistent, and will probably pay us another visit or two before dark, and then give us a lively night. That is their usual procedure.

We had a very helpful retreat, preached by Fr. John Murray, S.J. (Editor of the Month). I think the Retreat givers must have been told to be lenient and cheerful, for in three retreats I have heard of, the Father omitted meditations on Death and Hell. I suppose we have those topics kept before us sufficiently at present. Our retreat took place August 21-30. During one instruction there was a very loud Air-Raid and battles took place just over us. Father Murray thought Reverend Mother would tell him to stop, if necessary, and we all thought and hoped that *he* would stop. The result was that he went on and on—and we had to sit there through a terrific battle. Afterwards the Priest said he was astonished at our nerve, and would tell his brethren at Farm Street that in an Air-Raid when they would all have run to shelter, Holy Child nuns sat calmly in Church. I don't think that is quite a fair statement, as we were really dying to get away, and not feeling calm at all.

November 6, 1940

This is being written with my left hand, as I broke my right arm some days ago, falling down some steps in the darkness of our blackout. I expect I shall be able to use it again by the time this reaches you. Thank you very much for your most kind and welcome letter. We are all happy to have so many prayers from "ours" on the other side of the Atlantic, for



we are truly on the field of battle and in continual danger. But Our Lady protects us wonderfully.

Since I last wrote Coombe Bank has had two enormous bombs just outside their front door. They fell on a soft flower bed instead of on the hard gravel, which saved their lives, and the only result was a lot of smashed windows. The blast was so great that Reverend Mother was nearly blown out of the chapel, and it was a great shock to everyone.

When the Cavendish Square nuns went back to see what had happened to the Convent there after the explosion of the time bomb, they found all the front windows broken and the doors blown in. The Cardinal does not wish them to return there. . . .

We still have air raids every day and what is worse, every night. London has had 250 raids and as they pass over us going and returning we must have had about 500. On their return they make us a present of any bombs they have not used on London. About ten days ago we were roused in the night by two terrific bombs which we thought were on the house. They were really 200 yards away, but the thud of a 500 pound bomb falling nearly twenty-thousand feet must be felt to be realized. The whole house shakes, all the doors and windows rattle, and sometimes the books fall out of the bookcases. A few of our windows were broken and the Resurrection window in the church was badly cracked. But two days later came the worst night we had lived through. Enemy aeroplanes galloped and thudded over us continually from 7:30 P.M. till 3:30 A.M., dropping bombs at frequent intervals. We heard the next morning that 290 bombs had fallen in this district, but thanks to

Our Lady we were still untouched. Most of the Community spent the night downstairs, but the poor invalids could not get up. We have nine nuns over eighty in the Community and another ten over seventy. It is very hard for them.

Reverend Mother has gone on a visitation with Rev. Mother Provincial. It took her twelve hours to get from here to Oxford, a journey which usually takes four hours. They were turned out of the train three times to go into shelters and once a bomb whizzed past them before they could reach the shelter. At one stage they had to be transported by bus, as the line was damaged.

The nuns are wonderfully brave and calm and so indeed is everybody else. And they are so kind to those in distress. A poor labourer in the village here took in six homeless people to his little cottage and cheerfully slept on the floor himself. As you say, it is astonishing to see how coolly the children accept this state of things. Our children laugh when the nightly visitation begins and call out, "Good evening, Jerry!"

At Edgbaston they have had a lively time and now all the nuns and children sleep in the basement. They have specially constructed bunks which are very comfortable. At St. Leonard's there are still eight nuns with M.M.E. in charge. They are very bravely and cheerfully guarding the cradle of the S.H.C.J., amid constant danger. M.M.E. says their whole spiritual life is transformed and they live very near to God without anxiety or fear. The Blessed Sacrament is in the library parlour and they have Mass there every morning. We had a very happy and

amusing letter from the little Community at Chipping Norton. Their air raid shelter is in the crypt of the church, but as this contains several coffins, including that of our Earl of Shrewsbury, there is not much competition for entrance. They have had no raids so far. The Novices and Postulants continue peacefully at Clifton Hill.

"It seems to me," a Carmelite friend writes, "one place is as safe as another these days, and it is best to trust ourselves into God's loving Hands. We live here in great inward, if not outward peace—after all for us Carmelites our object is to become united to God—and if He sees fit to choose a bomb to do the deed, what matter as long as we live prepared. This little town is only sixteen miles from Plymouth, so you may imagine we are not quite exempt from sirens."

At the opposite pole, another friend wrote of some very worldly Catholics in the midst of danger in London. "Odd as it may seem, I think they, among many, are enjoying great interior peace. It is after all a great thing to *know* (not only to believe)—that nothing matters—God and one's soul are immortal."

Danger seems to have liberated personality so that people are far more themselves, far more characteristic, than in the old conventional life they have left behind. It is a picture of intense vitality that one sees thrown against the dark screen of danger and death. Leaving England lately, one observer said: "People elsewhere seem only half alive."

This liberating of personality means especially that people talk openly, as never before since the old Catholic

days, of real things, of the inner truths of the soul. Ruskin spoke once of Protestantism as having frozen the heart. Well, the English heart has thawed today in the fierce fire of the Blitz.

It has thawed and it has expanded to find place for enemies as well as for friends.

Remember the horrible story told by Kipling during the last war of the woman whose son had been killed and who took private vengeance on a German soldier. Such a story will never be told today, for, as all eye-witnesses agree, no spirit of hate is abroad.

The "yellow" press has made one or two attempts to awaken it, but with interesting lack of success.

In a radio talk by a Lady of the Grail describing the English Woman in the war, the speaker said:

There is one thing that we notice especially in the English woman in war-time. And that is the absence, even now, of all expressions of hate. Certainly they are firmly determined to win the war, because they know that the freedom of England, the freedom of all Europe, and of the largest part of the world depends on it. For that everything, even the greatest sacrifices, must be offered. That goal of freedom bans all hesitation from the heart of the English woman.

But still no tirades of abuse are heard against the Germans not even from those who have suffered most, who have had to give up their most precious possessions. On certain roads of England every day one can see fallen German planes being dragged away. The sight of these machines which continually threaten the lives of their dear ones awaken no outbursts of hate. They think sooner of the mother or

wife of the man who has died in the plane. It often happens that an English woman from the country gives First Aid to a German pilot who has had to save himself by parachute from his burning plane, that she cares for him as a mother until the officials whom she has notified come to arrest him.

The English woman knows how to adapt herself to her circumstances as well as the men who defend the country. She is brave but not vengeful. She knows how to bear things without giving up her principles. She can suffer without snuffing out the flame of love in her heart.

May the world peace which is desired by no one more than by her, soon be shared by us all. God Himself has laid that desire in the heart of man, but especially in the heart of the woman. So it can and must find its fulfillment.

Partly the place where hate might lodge is filled instead by admiration of one another. It is amusing almost to note how the north admires the south, the country-folk praise the Londoners—very unlike their old reactions.

“The poor folk in the south,” one of my cousins wrote me from Scotland, “have been having a fearful time and I can’t think how they stick it. I think it is a clear answer to all the prayers, for the spirit everywhere seems wonderful. I just hope the cry for reprisals isn’t growing as hate can lead us nowhere.”

The quiet determination to get *somewhere* has certainly helped to keep out a spirit of vengeance.

One Grail member writes to America

Imagine groping your way in the dark to church

after a disturbed night, with your nerves a bit on edge, hearing Mass in a totally dark church so that you can only follow the actions of the altar by the light of a shaded candle; the Blessed Sacrament taken away afterwards because it is not safe to leave It in churches far from the presbytery now: the rest of the day is pretty normal except that one does things at different times and plans everything to be back before dark if possible as it is much more difficult than when you were here. It is not too dreadful, but you must own it is a curious life and one that will make a lifelong mark on us all. Or else imagine yourself a keen Grail leader, your life formerly centering around your home and parish; now in a remote village, responsible entirely for a small group of children, probably meeting with much kindness, but entirely cut off from your "past". Mind you I think it will do nearly all of us good, and we have had to be shaken up, but it is just that it is curious. Everyone keeps amazingly cheerful and "nerve-free".

I think there will be a lot of converts, now and even more later. All the things I have told you must have an effect; and though some feel "why does God allow it", it is so definitely a case of an evil thing that is causing this misery in Europe that it is easier for thinking people to realize that, instead of its being God's fault that things are so bad, it must be because we, the world, have been trying to do without Him.

Apropos of that, don't believe the depressing reports you read in sensational papers! You only make yourself unhappy and you know these things are always exaggerated. We are learning in this country

some very useful lessons of not taking any material things for granted which in the past have been considered as essential to life, and so on, but apart from that we are well, busy and happy. People are behaving magnificently, it has been an eye-opener—even I think in those places where they would have preferred a very different reaction, judging from their reported efforts to explain it away, not very successfully, as “facts are facts”. Anyway, even if things were much worse than they were (and they aren’t), it would be difficult not to keep up one’s heart in the face of so much courage and good humour, so that can be to you for consolation if ever you feel worried about us.

Molly Gipps

The liberating of personality means that people not only find themselves talking of reality but talking of it in the way best fitted to them. On the whole, the English way is the way of at least half a jest in moments of deepest feeling. From Shakespeare to Chesterton stretches a long chain of humourists whose jokes are sometimes very superficial, sometimes profound. St. Thomas More died joking. And there is the story of Father Faber. Being very ill, he had asked that the prayers for the dying might be recited. When told his death was not imminent, he changed the request into: “Then read me *Pickwick*.”

Indeed Sam Weller is in the London streets today among “Hitler’s bloody housemaids,” nor are the other English humourists far away.

The holiday reading of my sister and her children in wartime is *Pickwick* and the rest of Dickens:

We are reading aloud Martin Chuzzlewit. Hester can make herself exactly like Pecksniff in the illustrations by squiffing her hair and puffing her face.

Holidays, however, come to an end. Hester goes back to school on Monday. They have moved again to another part of the same county as the previous place was not big enough. This (to follow your train of thought) will doubtless confuse Hitler.

Their home is so near Liverpool that it seemed wiser to give the children a few nights in a quieter place before school began again after the summer holidays.

I had been sorry to rouse the children from slumber so often at home, though Hester enjoyed it at first and kept a large bag of entertainments and provisions close by her bed.

Have just been rereading St. Theresa's *Interior Castle*. This is most tremendously interesting in view of (modern) psychological study. I don't think the book can really be known in that world. There is a lot to be written on those lines one days, I imagine. . . .

I have a heap of family letters written from the midst of the Blitz, yet very little in them is of general interest. School news, family births and marriages, books and jokes fill the pages.

One family had been kept in London by the father's business and his wife and daughter had stayed, too. "He likes the noise of the guns and she likes watching the sky," her sister reported, after some fearful air raids. At last they left London and the reactions of their twenty-year old daughter interested her aunt, who wrote:

Maureen is returning to London! having written



a quite charming ballet and composed the décor. She hopes it will be taken for one of the short lunch period ballets which, I gather, are the fashion now. She played me the skeleton and showed me the drawings, but as you know, it meant nothing for me to like it as I am utterly unmusical; and N., who is not only musical but understands time and theory, was too annoyed with Maureen for burning the saucepans and muddling the washing up, to make time to listen to it!! Also she found it hard to understand M's complete detachment from the world of facts at a time of so much stress—in which N. herself is doing a hundred good works. I must say, too, that I think it is odd. Maureen came straight from a terrible time in London and her ballet, clasped tight, was her one preoccupation. It reminds me of her father years ago in Paris pursuing a manuscript down the railway line in front of a train—ten trains wouldn't have stopped him! Anyway I think it's a very good thing that there are still some people left to create pleasure and beauty.

I must stop. I shall be committing an unpatriotic act by wasting the time of His Majesty's censor.

It was planned by the cousin who wrote this letter that three of her six children should be sent over to us in America:

Of course I hate the idea [she wrote] of being without them and they want to go in a way, but don't want to leave England "if she is going to be bombed" . . . I know that whatever happens one way or the other it will be for the best for all concerned even if the end remains hidden in Eternity . . .

It was a great sorrow not to have seen you this time but a little one in the ocean of distress. I think it is splendid that you got the children off and think of two young lives trained in peaceful surroundings . . .

All is well and happy here at present and the spirit everywhere is excellent but prolonged strain—if that is what it is to be—is not likely to help the young.

These particular children had been much separated from their mother owing to the little boy's terrible asthma. He had been obliged to spend two or three years in Switzerland with a nurse and one of his sisters.

The children much regret [their mother wrote] having left their skis in Switzerland! They packed 17 pieces of luggage in four hours and got home by the last train that ran normally, about a week before Calais fell! It was almost miraculous. The children will love to tell you about it.

The sinking of the "City of Benares" before Bernard had got up enough strength to travel brought the whole scheme to an end. Like my own nine year old son Bernard had not wanted "to desert England in her hour of need" but one of his sisters was decidedly disappointed. Her clothes were bought and everything ready.

"She is looking forward" her mother wrote "to a brilliant career in Sheed and Ward punctuated with bathing, riding, dancing etc and ending with marriage with an entirely amiable millionaire."

Children in America, and children in the English countryside, and children in London. What is their at-

mosphere, and what has the war brought to them or taken from them?

Talking of "The English Child in the War," a Lady of Grail answers these questions about the children in war-time England.

O Happy child  
That lying in the sand,  
Can let the world,  
So peacefully drift by.

O happy child  
That worries not,  
Nor spends a thought  
Upon the morrow.

O happy child  
Whose every step in life,  
A step is nearer,  
To the heavenly children's land.

O happy child,  
I would give all and everything,  
For your happiness, my child,  
As you lie and sift the sand.

This was the song that the Flemish poet, Guido Gezelle, sang a few decades ago. The child of 1940, is still as carefree and playful, but it is not entirely undisturbed by the present circumstances. The English youth take their part in the war very seriously. Perhaps because frequently during the children's hour on the radio comes a talk "from man to man" and makes them feel that they are of importance, and

that the grown-ups are expecting something from them now, too.

"Why should I cry?" asked a child who had just been bombed out of his house. "Why, I am seven years old!" He was a man, and must carry himself as a man. Children love to be treated as intelligent people. Now they are helping earnestly, as Scouts, or by means of other youth groups. It isn't a game any longer, but their share in the great combat that their country must win to make all the people and all the children of Europe free to be able to serve God, and their country in liberty.

They work so zealously, gathering iron and lead, bones, newspapers, cardboard, and everything under the sun, with such a devotion that we adults stand amazed. A little street urchin out of the slums swaggers along wearing his "Salvage Warden" badge. He is the official leader of his own group of companions who zealously collect all they can find.

They plant vegetables in their little gardens, or if they don't have them, they plant radishes in their window boxes. Especially the country children count again and have their share in all kinds of Chores. Where formerly they had perhaps a couple of doves to play with, now Mother has entrusted them with the care of the chickens. And now they eat their own eggs with much more appreciation than before when they brought them from the store. They keep rabbits: they tramp regularly through the woods to gather the acorns for the farmers who must use them for fodder for their pigs in the coming winter.

Christopher, has received a shilling from his uncle, the first shilling in his life. That means a great deal

to seven year old Christopher. If you are the next to the youngest in a large family and there are many times when your father doesn't have work, then the pennies don't come rolling toward you. Christopher is more than delighted. He rolls the shilling back and forth across the table, lets it fall on the ground, picks it up again, polishes it on his sleeve until it shines. "Look out now, Christopher" says his kind-hearted uncle, "when you go by a candy store. If I were you I should hold my eyes shut tight." But Christopher, doesn't have to be afraid of the temptation of the candy store. Indeed he has already made up his mind. With his precious shilling he buys a "war-savings-certificate", for he, too, will "help to win the war".

Before September 1939, the English child lived, like most children, in a comparatively small circle. Since then his horizon and the sphere of his interests has widened immensely. Now, for example, he learns his geography as a game. No longer is it a separate and abstract science. The names of lands and continents, of cities and rivers and mountains, are ringing in his ears every day. He is as familiar with them now as formerly with the names of autos, movie-stars and the different kinds of airplanes. The natural interest of a child in animals, and plants, and everything that lives and grows has increased greatly in the past year, and is encouraged from every side. The children's hour on the radio is of immense importance for this, too. There they learn exactly how to build their own little gardens and how to help to "dig for victory", how to look after the different kinds of animals in the best and most efficient way,

why they should look for acorn and beechnuts, how they can recognize the best acorns, etc.

For parents the war is a time of extra care and sacrifice, but for many children the bombardments with all their changes and novelties provide new thrills. During a bombardment a mother was talking very loudly to keep her little girl distracted, when the child asked: "Mother would you mind talking a little bit softer, please? Otherwise I can't hear the bombs." And a small boy whose conscience was troubling him because he had been asked to pray for peace, finally confided his difficulty to someone: "You see", he said, while he was admiring a new crater in the middle of the street, on his way to a shelter in which he had never yet been, "I think this is so much fun." But when they explained to him that his mother was in danger from the bombs, and he certainly wouldn't like to be without her, then his love for his mother won out over his hobby of inspecting craters and shelters, and he resolved to pray "that the war may soon be over."

And finally: if I think of the children in wartime one scene always keeps coming back up into my thoughts. It happened in the first month of the war when thousands of children were evacuated out of London for greater safety. It had all been well prepared. The children behaved gallantly. A reporter from the British Broadcasting Corporation who was traveling with the children tried to start a conversation with them. Among other things he said to them: "It would be so much nicer if you knew exactly where you were going." One of the children who with the greatest attention was watching the land-

scape rolling by outside the window, turned around with a jerk and said, "But the King knows it!" Such conviction and confidence struck even a newspaper man speechless. The child was right, and in a deeper sense that he himself realized. For better than the King of England, the King of Heaven and Earth knows where they are all going. And we can safely trust ourselves and all our dear ones to Him.

## CHAPTER IV

# Work in the Shelters

SHELTER life in London has been written of at different dates and stages. The Grail can speak with a variety of experience—and especially with a Catholic experience—that few possess. Here is a letter to their American house:

December 15th, 1940

58 Sloane Street  
London, S.W.

This shelter visiting provided one of the most interesting experiences I have ever had. I have never met so many friendly, helpful and courteous people in one evening as we have met among the East End dockworkers and I have never come across such excellent family life and true Christianity in this country as among these people. I had read a good deal about the deficiencies and dangers of public shelters while at Oxford and was astonished about the improvements that were made within three months after the beginning of the raids. It is no joke to make adequate provisions for hundreds of thousands of people. So far I saw four public shelters in Chelsea and about ten in the East End. All the public shelters approved of by the boroughs are clean, well ventilated, disinfected, well lit and generally heated. Nearly all of them are by now provided with bunks, so that people can lie down and sleep. They only



need to bring their own rugs. As the same people come to the same shelter and have bunks assigned to them, they can keep these as clean as they wish to themselves. But what makes these shelters a real "home away from home" is the friendliness and helpfulness of their inmates and the kindness and untiring zeal of the staff, who are nearly all of them voluntary workers. I shall try and describe to you one of these shelters under a big building in the East End. It has accommodation for 1300 people.

We got there at about 6 p.m., when the people were coming in for the evening. It was beautifully clean, looked as if it were scrubbed every day, well ventilated, white-washed, disinfected, provided with bunks for 1300 people. Both day and night marshalls are Catholics and Jean had seen one of them during the day, and obtained permission for an "A.M." sale. There were very many children in this place and infants and even babies.

Families sit together as a rule, the middle bunk of a three tiers bunk can be so arranged as to form the back of the family seat provided by the bottom one.

It is pleasantly warm, you can read, write letters, knit, sit and talk together, or lie down and rest. Many people in this way get perhaps a better night's rest than they normally would. The people have their own bunks assigned to them, family by family. If you are a newcomer (as we were) the marshall gives you a bunk amongst suitable people. During the evening he comes several times and makes sure that you are all right. There is a Red Cross nurse on the spot, who goes around the place in the evening

and makes sure that everyone is all right, treats minor ailments, and, if necessary, more serious ones. A Medical Officer goes round and inspects the shelters. Medical students assist at Red Cross Posts.

If the physical welfare of the people is well provided for, their spiritual welfare is by no means neglected.

Between eight and ten in the evening, a Catholic priest comes in. The Marshall accompanies him and asks people to keep quiet for evening prayers. The priest then says a few appropriate words. Then prays aloud with the people an Our Father, Hail Mary, the Creed, the Memorare and another prayer to Our Lady, which the people repeat after him. All the Catholics and many others recite the prayers aloud with him. Those who do not pray keep quiet. There is not a sound! Then the priests suggests to say an act of contrition together after which he will give general absolution and a blessing. And so all go to sleep in an extraordinary peace of mind. You feel ready to face whatever may happen. God surely gives many graces in these shelters for night prayers to affect the whole crowd.

The particular priest whom we met visits 20 to 30 shelters each night, talks to the people, says night prayers with them and gives them absolution and in this way comes in contact with thousands of people each day.

The night raids and excellent shelter accommodations provide opportunities which a priest never finds in peace time. In one evening he sees more of his parishioners (and of others) than he could possibly do during weeks of home visiting. The circum-

stances cause that he can be direct and to the point and need not waste his time in unnecessary or lengthy conversations.

He introduces the habit of family night prayers, not only to Catholics, but to all Christians, in fact to all who wish to believe in God. In the friendliness, helpfulness and courtesy of all the people and their decent behaviour you sense the presence of a Christian community. A high percentage of the East Enders are staunch Catholics. There are crowds of children in all the shelters. They do not seem to believe in evacuation. In none of the places I saw the children rude or rowdy. The parents and older people are very kind to them and not at all strict. Yet, they do not make a nuisance of themselves, neither are they considered as such (i.e. the children).

There is a real family spirit in all shelters. As soon as you enter them you feel at home, although you are a stranger to everybody. The people are mostly of the same neighborhood and know one another.

One could expect gangs of growing boys and girls to herd together, but one hardly finds this at all. They stay with the family and perhaps have their boy friends or girl friends with them. Under the eyes of parents and friends they cannot easily come to harm. Although men and women, boys and girls all sleep together in one place (and spend the evening together, from 6 p.m. onwards)—family by family—you are not aware of anything offensive, of any roughness or vulgarity. Between ten and eleven the Marshall goes around to see whether everyone is alright and to prevent the kiddies falling off their bunks.

After ten o'clock most of the lights go out except those in the gangways, so that you can sleep and yet are not left in complete darkness.

The whole place is then snoring away in minor and major, in hundreds of tunes and tempos, babies are whimpering, children talking or crying in their sleep, but it does not seem to worry you at all, and you feel that the best you can do is to join in the concert. You are warm and at peace in body and soul, and if anything keeps you awake for a little while it is a feeling of intense happiness, that God has created so many excellent people.

In the morning we were called for Mass by our kind Marshall. Incidentally he goes around from 5 a.m. in the morning, calling everyone at the time desired in a most friendly manner. We said goodbye to our host, who was seeing off his thousand guests, and received directions as to how to get to church. There was a very thick fog and you could hardly see at all, but after one or two minutes we hit upon a Home Guard, who at once accompanied us all the way down to church (nearly ten minutes away). He was a non-Catholic but he knew the parish priest and did not leave us until he had guided us right to the church, using his own torch all the time. We were simply overwhelmed by the helpfulness and kindness of all the people we met. Everytime we entered a shelter, it was like coming home to a place where you were warmly welcomed and well looked after. No one leaves you to fend for yourself. They nearly always take you from one shelter to another and introduce you to its Marshall or leader. In all

these places you felt the power of genuine Christianity in the life (particularly the family life!) of the people. Nearly all of the East Enders have large families, are proud and fond of their children and the children of their parents! You feel that they should not be separated unless it is absolutely necessary and even then only for a short period. For if the children need their parents, the parents equally need their children. From the family point of view, it is better to be bombed together than to be separated, although one understands the attitude of the Government which does not want to sacrifice its future citizens. These East End Catholic families form the backbone of Britain, and its future depends for a considerable part on them.

We visited also two shelters underneath an Anglican Church. The parson himself happened to be marshall of the place and although he neither knew us nor our shelter journal he at once gave us permission to sell it. He ascended a little platform and gave the news out himself, encouraging the people to buy it. At once children and grown-ups came towards us, pennies in hand. It is astonishing how generous these people are. When we had gone round both shelters the clergyman asked for a few quiet minutes in order to say evening prayers. Devoutly and sincerely he said two short prayers and these were followed by an Our Father in which most of them joined. This was our first impression of "family night prayers." Many people joined in, whilst those, who perhaps did not believe, anyway kept quiet. In these two shelters there were also many children and

there was a Christian atmosphere about these places. So far about our shelter impressions.

It is unnecessary to say that we are all of us well indeed and are looking forward to spending Christmas together at Eastcote. Shall have a Triduum from Sunday 22nd.

Yours as ever,

L.

The first number of the Grail shelter journal was indeed enthusiastically received; it expresses so perfectly the atmosphere in England today that it seems worthwhile to reproduce part of the first article:

One Penny

A.M.

A JOURNAL FOR EVERYONE WHO SHELTERS

If Hitler can persuade us that the only thing shelters can do is to sit and wait for his bombs, then he wins. But if we refuse to think like that, then we win. There is one idea we have to hang on to in the shelters;—our part there is as vital as the fireman's part, the warden's part, the gunner's part. Every single one of us is helping or holding up our chance of victory by the way *we* act. Lending a hand, or only caring about your own comfort may seem little things,—they're not. Every action, every word, of everyone who shelters is affecting someone, and these people affect other people. A stone dropped into a pond makes rings that spread wider and wider until you can't trace them. Our words, our actions, our thoughts, even, are like that stone. "A.M." is written to help people to realise that idea. It isn't wishful

thinking to say that the way *I* act in the shelter has a real bearing on the way the war goes. It's true.

### S.P. OR S.B.?

No one who has spent a night in a shelter will be unfamiliar with Shelter Pests and Shelter Blessings. No one will like to consider himself among the Pests. And yet everyone inclines to one or the other. You can find out quite easily whether you are a Pest or a Blessing. Answer the following questions:\*

*Personality.* Are people glad to see you arrive in the shelter? . . . Do they make room for you willingly? . . . Are children glad to be with you? . . . Can you turn doubtful conversation to something better? . . . Do people readily fall in with your suggestions? . . .

*Patriotism.* Do you squash defeatist rumours? . . . Do you obey the shelter officials' directions? . . . Do you ignore attempts to make you dissatisfied? . . . Do you keep silent about things *you* know, and that others shouldn't? . . . Do you ever pray for victory? . . .

*Character.* Can you keep out of dirty talk? . . . Can people depend on your promises? . . . Do you stick to your principles? . . . Would you give up your own safety, if it helped to win the war? . . . Will you put up with discomfort for the sake of others? . . .

*Tact.* Are you decent to people who come and tell you all their woes? . . . Can you listen—and seem interested—when people start long-winded,

\* A chart was provided on which people might mark their answers to this "questionnaire."

boring conversation? . . . Do you hide your own fear in front of children? . . . Do you treat older children as sensible human beings? . . . Would you ever move to a new place so that a family could sit together? . . .

*Tidiness.* Do you clear up all your rubbish when you leave the shelter? . . . Do you bother about the way you look? . . . Are the blankets and rugs you take with you clean? . . . Are you careful about scattering cigarette ash everywhere? . . . Do you put newspaper on the ground, under your blanket? . . .

*Sociability.* Are you ready to talk to the people next to you? . . . Are you willing to share any food you have with you? . . . Do you keep out of rows? . . . If you see people getting annoyed do you try to calm things down? . . . If you were doing a cross-word puzzle would you ask the people around to help you? . . .

*Cheerfulness.* When you discuss the war are you optimistic? . . . Do you ever try to lighten people's gloomy conversation? . . . Can you keep a couple of children amused for an hour? . . . Can you keep your temper when people around you are annoying? . . . Do you often laugh when you're sheltering? . . .

*Thoughtfulness* Would you ever move up a bit to let people stretch their legs? . . . Would you stop smoking if you were sitting near small children? . . . Do you ever wonder if you can help any of the people sitting near you? . . . Do you pass on your paper to someone else when you've finished with it? . . . Do you try to be quiet when others are asleep? . . .

*Helpfulness.* Are you ready to help a child that



asks you something? . . . Do you give advice when it is asked? . . . Do you try to make the people around you comfortable? . . . Would you look after a child while its mother got a sleep? . . . Would you ever help people with their baggage? . . .

Finally from the Grail Magazine itself comes a shelter picture that makes this underground life of London live again for us:

As far as we could see the basement floor was littered with heaps of bulging sacks. The floor was at four levels; the electric bulbs hung at four heights, and the shadows of the sacks crossed and re-crossed in a dozen different depths of grey and black. No one needed to be told what the sacks held. This was a spice warehouse. The smell of pepper, cinnamon, cloves, and caraway rose up around us. So did an occasional whiff of Milton, for the shelter marshal sprayed the place each evening. If the brown men and women who had picked these spices could have seen them now they would have been amazed. For each sack was a bed; each heap of sacks a family corner, where children played their own version of marbles with the nutmegs oozing from a broken bag. This was an air-raid shelter.

We were not there to sleep, but to sell "A.M.'s." Though we were only a small group of four here, there were other groups scattered in various London shelters, and in other cities, selling "A.M.'s."

This was not a progressive shelter; it had no bunks, though, by now, tens of thousands of bunks are installed in other places. They say one can get used to

anything, but sleeping on a sack of peppercorns must take some practice. Yet no one except us sneezed. They didn't notice it now, they said. Overhead there was a dim, almost continual thunder; it was the guns. Nobody noticed it; indeed it was the intervals of silence that called for comment.

We had never seen the shelter marshal before; we told him what we had come for. He listened patiently and then climbed on to a heap of sacks and called for attention. "You're always grouching that no one does anything for you," he called. "Well, now, you won't be able to grumble so easy. Here's something for you." Slowly he read from the cover "'A.M.'"—a journal for everyone who shelters. That's you and me, isn't it?" He put his hand in his pocket. "One penny only and worth double."

This was sheer politeness, for he had read no more than the sentence he quoted. But the result of his words were that it was exceptional family that did not have their copy of "A.M." And very spicy and aromatic it must have been by the morning!

A word of explanation or approval from the shelter marshal was the usual thing on these "A.M." expeditions, and the influence of these men on the shelterers is generally very great. Some marshals helped to distribute; many suggested other shelters too. "Tell them that Joe sent you along" was the formula. And obedience to Joe's directions sent one down rickety ladders into public-house basements, down area steps into re-inforced coal cellars, into church crypts, down under billiard saloons and shops and offices—once under railway arches down a tunnel that fell away mysteriously into the earth and

opened out into a sort of cave, where a group of tramps sat round a brazier, full of glowing wood plundered from some heap of wreckage. They were incredibly poor, destitute and weary, crouching over the fire. God knows what they did in the day time. "This is my only bit of comfort," said an old crone, toothlessly. She was drinking methylated spirits out of an enamel mug. Surprisingly she had a penny and insisted on giving it to us. "I can't read, so it's no good giving it to me. Give it to him," and she jerked her head towards a lanky skeleton of a youth, who sat staring into the bucket of fire and rubbing his blue fingers.

What an incredible collection of people sheltering night after night deep under the streets of London! Tramps like these, babies who were born here while the bombs screamed from the sky, workmen, mothers of families, poets, and children. Never since history was written can so many different people have been housed together, white men and Negro, men and women of all the nations of Europe, young and old, good and bad, Jew and Gentile, and all mysteriously sorting themselves out so that generally like congregates with like. Millions of people together night after night in hard uncomfortable surroundings—and yet the very hardness and discomfort and impersonality of it all is the very thing that draws out of thousands virtues that a saint might envy. They grumble; but they grumble about the talkative woman in the bunk opposite, about the family that insists on playing the gramophone for hours, about the quality of the canteen cocoa, the staple drink of the shelters. But they never grumble about spending night after night as they do, or about the hardship

of the war, and the prospect that it might go on for years.

Near that spice warehouse was another shelter, with central heating and with bunks, complete, like an ever-increasing number of shelters, with a First Aid post, a doctor, a canteen, a piano and even a concert party. But not one of those people dreamed of changing shelters. They had started by coming here and they would stay until the place was bombed, and if anything was left standing they would still stay. It is the same instinct that A.R.P. workers have to fight every day when men and women clamour to be left in their half demolished homes. It is a fundamental instinct, a pathetic clinging to what seems permanent, a self-deception that there is something in the world that will go on for ever. That is why every family that shelters tries to make a home there, to settle down, to dig themselves in. This is forbidden in the shelters; they may not be homes. But here and there families have ridden rough shod over the rules and turned their corners into something remotely resembling home. It is mostly the people who have been bombed out who succeed. In the corner of a draper's shop we found an example of this. A brass bedstead, a chair, a canary in a cage and an oak-framed photograph. "That's all that was left," said the woman cheerfully, who was sitting on the chair and knitting at a speed that had to be seen to be believed. She had put a cloth over the bird cage and he was silent. She had hung the photograph from the foot of the bed. It was faded and flyblown; it must have been her wedding portrait, for she wore a high-necked dress, leg-of-mutton sleeves, and a hat heavy with flowers; her arm was laid on the arm of

a man who sported a waxed moustache and clutched a tall bowler hat in his hand. It was ludicrous; it was a ridiculous collection of junk. No rag-and-bone man would have given more than ninepence for the lot. But it was her home.

She stopped knitting to bring a penny out of a rusty black bag and to put on her spectacles. She had a little spirit lamp behind her and a kettle boiling. This, despite the fact that there was a canteen in the next room. "That's for my boy Jim," she said. "He'll be here soon; he brings his girl here and we all have supper together." She nodded sagely toward the canteen. "They don't know how he likes his tea," she said, "but I do. And he'd rather have my way; it's more homely like." She was a great talker. She would have given us tea only it meant that it might be cold when Jim arrived. Did we see the scarf she was knitting? That was for Fred, her boy in the Army. Oh yes, she had four boys but only Jim was at home. And when she said "at home" she meant this corner! Then she must have caught sight of Jim, for she put the knitting away hastily and thanked us for the "A.M." and promised to make Jim read it too. "He reads everything; he's got a head," she said significantly. "And this is the first paper I've ever seen for folk who shelter. It's new. Our Jim'll like it. He likes anything new."

It was this woman who told us about the priest who came there every evening to say night prayers with the people. That priest is not unique; there are many of them, who tramp from one shelter to another in the darkness, defying blitz and bombs, and who are really welcomed by the crowds. There is no fear of the shelterers feeling that here is some-

one who has dropped in to hand out a dose of religion. They know that many of these priests are homeless too, that they eat in communal feeding centres, sleep if they sleep at all, in church crypts, or in basements, sharing everything with the people they are working for. Not only the Catholic priests come in the evenings into underground shelters. Under many a church crypt Anglicans and Free Church ministers are doing the same.

We left the brass bedstead and the spluttering kettle. We could not sleep there, for every place was taken. But the marshal knew another place, and a short cut to reach it. Outside the sky was red and glowing as the tramps' fire had been. Part of the City was ablaze and the clouds of smoke rose huge and heavy, dimming the searchlights. It was a Londoner who said that night that he had lost most of his fear of hell, for the flames of hell would have a job to beat these. It was as light as day, with a red glare. We saw the illuminated "S" that stands for shelter, and crawled down a spiral staircase that never seemed to end. We were in a disused underground railway station, hundreds of feet beneath the fires. It was a tunnel a mile long, and the walls were lined with rows of three-decker bunk beds. The track had been boarded up and now there were single bunks along the walls, then a gangway, then two rows pushed close together, another gangway, and another single row stretching on and on, until the eye could no longer follow them.

They were putting the children to bed, undressing them and fixing them securely in the lower bunks, the very small ones being laced in, with pieces of string. In the shadows a woman, a girl almost,

had wakened her child to feed it. Beside her was a wooden apple box and within it lay the baby's shawl and a blue celluloid rattle. He was half asleep and the milk trickled down his chin. She smiled faintly at us. She had been sheltering there for two months and the baby had been born there. Her husband was fetching cocoa from the canteen; he had been reading and the book lay face downwards on the bunk. It was a Penguin edition of "The Compleat Angler." Strange shades of sunlit water, and branches bending over streams and flies and fishes in this vast subterranean dormitory a mile long!

But even here the marshals could find no room. They knew who slept in every bunk, knew the people by name, called the early risers in the morning, put their money together and decorated the shelter for Christmas. "There's not one empty place" said the chief marshal. He hated to disappoint anyone. So he went round selling "A.M.'s" and forced cups of cocoa on us before letting us leave. His was not exceptional kindness, but the typical friendly attitude of marshals and shelterers to all strangers and to each other.

So ultimately we came to a Tube station, where the most silent figure was a small child lying asleep in an open suit case, quite oblivious of the incessant roar of the trains and the grating of the escalators. Along the platforms, up the steps, on the landings, was a mass of men and women. Everyone was going to bed, which for the women involved putting on hair-nets and for the men the taking off of coats and collars. Sleeping on boards would be a mere nothing to these people for they sleep on stone, and stone

littered with empty cigarette packets and bits of paper. A year ago they would have thought it an impossibility. To-day, they lay their heads on suitcases, and are asleep in ten minutes. The air was hot and stale here, but no sound of the guns penetrated. We spread our blankets above a trapdoor, which, we were told was sometimes opened from below, but no one knew when, so they thought it would be all right. There was not enough room and there were two vacant spaces at the foot of the escalator. A little grey-haired man told us to take them. They were his, he said, but he didn't want them and his wife wasn't there to-night. A few minutes later he opened a cardboard bottle of milk and after pouring out a little, handed us the rest. "I bring it every night," he told us, "because there's always someone who can do with it." Deprecatingly, he laughed and said that he couldn't drink a pint by himself anyway. That was not the only thing he did for us—possibly he did this too, every night, for someone who could do with it. He gave up his own place, though we did not realise it until later. The trains roared every two minutes and the grating and rolling of the escalator never stopped for a moment. Then after what seemed hours they both ceased. It was 1 a.m. It was only then that the little man could rest, sitting on the escalator until it began its weary journey again at five o'clock in the morning.

One would expect silence after the din of the trains had ceased. For a moment or two there seemed to be silence. And then the snores and groans and grunts and stirrings of these hundreds of people rose up into a sound that made the escalator machinery seem almost musical.



A million people asleep in the Undergrounds, millions in other shelters, all in the helplessness of sleep, all wanting something they do not even realise. For life in the shelters is making even the blindest see that homes and families do not last for ever, but can be snatched away in an instant. There is nothing permanent, and the sad efforts to turn a few feet of stone wall into a home are only an admission that the one thing all these people want is something that will last forever. These shelters are fields, ploughed by the plough of God and waiting for seed. It is the war that has performed the almost unbelievable task of opening eyes to the true values of life.

Though they do not know it, all these people are crying out for a Peter Claver, for apostles. Perhaps the war will produce a saint of the shelters. At any rate, no apostle ever had a richer field to work in, for this new life being lived underground by millions of people offers prospects of apostolate that are beyond reckoning.

Humanitarians are there enough; they give tea and cocoa and coffee. They see that the shelters are lighted and heated, the people comfortable and even entertained. They do all that because they love men. But that is only scratching the surface. To get down to the root of things is to help these people, not because they are men, but because they are Christ. Christ in the apple-box crib, Christ coming home to the boiling kettle, Christ sitting among the spices, and giving up his place to others. Christ huddled over the brazier of fire. But all unconscious of their Christhood until the saint of the shelters shall make it known to them.

## CHAPTER V

# One Office to Another

BESIDE our Business Manager two members of our firm have at different dates been writing from England—Marigold Hunt (our Editor in America, who went to England for a visit last summer and was kept there by her father's illness) and my husband. Here is a November letter written by Miss Hunt to a friend in the New York office:

It is very nice, of course, that we should be so far out in the country here that we have never yet seen an air raid warden and only hear a siren when the wind happens to be the right way. But it gets a bit monotonous reading about what is happening in London and never being able to think of an excuse to go and see it. So last week I decided to go anyway, with no excuse at all. What I particularly wanted to see was how far life in London now is different to life there before the war.

So up I went. The station I arrived at seemed just as usual, only oddly light. A good deal of the dirty glass in the roof had been broken and the sun shone on the platforms for the first time in many years. Outside the station everything looked extraordinarily ordinary at first. The barrage balloons overhead I had seen before, and now loved all over again. They shine like silver in the sun and look like fat, comfort-

able guardian angels hovering over the city, and so, in a way, they are. While I waited for a bus I heard the sirens going, and presently looking up, because other people were looking up, I saw what looked like sky-writing in Chinese appearing against the blue sky. It took me some time to realize that I was seeing a dog-fight.

The tiny hotel where I stay in London was still there, though I knew there was a double chance it wouldn't be—there had been bombs near it and the proprietor and his family are Italians, and might have been interned. When the proprietor opened the door to me he said that they almost had been, but not quite, and now he had a young brother in the British Army, and one of his cousins had been killed by a bomb, and yes, there had been bombs nearby, but none on his little hotel yet, he thanked God.

Going out again to look for tea, I went into a Lyons (which is like Childs, but less grand) and found that I must have it in a cup—no more tea pots for the duration! Outside again, I saw a bright yellow bus, marked "Glasgow Corporation"—as startling a sight as a red bus would be on Fifth Avenue. Also I discovered that if you want to know the time in London now, you must ask. The insides of all the clocks on the streets seem to have fallen out. I still didn't see much damage, only a large hole in the road which my bus had to run down all kinds of odd side streets to avoid. But when I tried to go to a favorite store to buy stockings, lo! It wasn't there—only a nasty mess of bent iron and rubble. So I went elsewhere for stockings, and bought a pair of shoes,

too. In the shoe-shop I discovered that all the high-heeled shoes were cheap and the low-heeled ones much more plentiful but expensive. The shop-girl explained that everyone was having to walk much more than they used to, so they all wanted low-heeled shoes, and she didn't know what they were going to do with the high-heeled ones.

On my way back to the hotel I heard the siren again. It was getting dark, and I could see flashes of light in the sky as well as hearing A.A. guns popping. Back in the hotel, I watched the raid from the wash-room window. It was like a thunderstorm and a fireworks display combined. It didn't look alarming, and I wasn't sure whether I was supposed to be alarmed and go sit in a shelter, or whether it was all right to go on with my business—which was to go out and get supper. I came downstairs, anyway, and found more guests registering in the hall. The old Italian grandmother was standing by the front door. She opened it when she saw me, and said with a beaming smile, "You are not fright', Madame?" So obviously I was expected to go out, and out I went. Outside there was a very faint star light, gun flashes, and minute points of light on cars, on street islands, and tiny red or green gleams from the traffic lights. There were quite a lot of people in the street, and they didn't seem to bump into each other or fall over things half so much as you would think. The restaurant where I went to look for supper was just closing—at seven o'clock in the evening! There seemed to be nothing open and willing to feed me anywhere about, so I ended up in a station buffet, eating ham sandwiches and listening to more bangs and bumps.

The other people in the buffet were an R.A.F. corporal ruminating over a pipe, two tommies with two girls, a group telling stories by the bar and an elderly gentleman drinking beer in a bored but steady way. None of them appeared to be aware of the air raid.

When I had crept back to the hotel (making as much noise as possible with my feet so as not to be bumped into more than necessary) the proprietor let me in and remarked happily, "For seven or eight nights now we have had it quiet like this." I looked at him suspiciously, but he really meant it. Just the same, he told me next morning that he had almost called me in the night to come downstairs and say the rosary with his family. But I was asleep and heard little more before the morning. That was All Souls Day morning and I heard Mass at Westminster Cathedral. There was a daylight raid going on at the time, so the *Dies Irae* was sung to a rumbling accompaniment of gunfire—it sounded almost too good to be true.

I spent most of that day shopping and looking at bombed houses. But one bombed building looks much like another, unless it is a place you knew or were fond of.

This was a Saturday, so in the afternoon I went first to Confession and then to a movie, which always seems the right way to end a week. Confession was easy enough, but the movie was much more difficult. When there are no flashing lights to lead you to the picture you want to see, and some movie theatres are closed and some are being used for something other than showing pictures, discovering something you

want to see becomes curiously complicated. In fact, I ended up as dusk was falling, at a newsreel theatre at Piccadilly Circus. When I went in the audience was being shown, most elaborately, how to ski, with diagrams about how to place your feet when about to make a Christiania turn, and so on. It didn't seem terribly useful information at the moment, nor did the next thing, which was about how fish are caught on some lake in Canada. After these two treats came one of those horrible films of a band playing. I never could see what advantage it is to be shown what a trombone player looks like, it's generally bad enough to have to listen to him. But Popeye came next and cheered us up. Half way through him ALERT appeared in red letters just below the screen. Then we saw pictures of how London looked after being bombed, and finally an educational picture about how discouraged Abraham Lincoln was at fifty, and how hearing about it stopped another discouraged old guy from jumping in a lake. After that I came out in rather a bad temper, and stepped into the blackest wettest night on earth. If you can imagine coming out on to Broadway after dark and finding all the lights gone, a wet fog, and plenty of people about, you will see what it felt like. I tried to get to the subway station but it seemed to have moved and in about half a minute I was completely and beautifully lost.

There was a raid going on, and the gun-flashes were such a help I almost prayed for them. Whenever I could see or hear anybody else close to me, I asked them the way to the subway, and at last found it, and it was closed. I had gone to Piccadilly Circus

by subway and had seen the walls all lined with people who had come down to spend the night there. They had mackintoshes and things marking out the bit of platform they wanted to lie on, and bedding done up in suitcases and bundles. This was at about 5.30 and most of them were knitting and talking, though a few had already settled down for the night. There were three girls sitting at the bottom of the steps at one station, who were doing everything they knew to attract attention, having evidently come down to get off. The few children I saw looked sleepy and pathetic. Myself, I would rather be bombed in bed than spend a night in that atmosphere. There didn't seem to be any air at all. What it must be like in the early morning I daren't think. Now the subway was closed so that all these people could sleep in peace, as I might have guessed it would be.

Anyhow, I tried again, and at last found a bus, more by luck than design. It wasn't going just where I wanted to, but near enough. So I crawled in, and gave the conductor what I thought were two pennies. When he held them under a little spot of light they turned out to be half-crowns (50 cent pieces) which amused the other passengers, but disgusted the conductor who was wet, cold and tired of blackouts and all the rest of it. The last part of the journey had still to be made, and I was searching for a bus that would do it, when I came upon a subway, and it was open! Apparently people don't sleep in that one. But everything in the way of a restaurant was shut by that time, so I ended up eating ham sandwiches in the railway station again.

On Sunday afternoon I went to Tyburn Convent,

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where four candles are always burning, one for the Pope, one for the King, one for the Church and one for England. The nun who opened the door said she was sorry, the chapel would not be open again until tomorrow. Yes, they had been bombed and had had to leave the convent for a few days, but they were back now. While I was talking to her an old gentleman arrived carrying a large hare. He said he had shot it yesterday, and would they care to have it? Yes, indeed, and Sister Gertrude was coming back tomorrow, so she would be able to cook it.

The rest of the day was almost blotted out by rain and more rain. I rang up everyone I ever knew in London, but none of them were at home. So in despair I went and looked for a movie again, Sunday and all, and found *Pride and Prejudice*, and very good it was.

Next morning (there were no raids that night) I found I had exactly enough money to get home and pay my comic hotel, so that ended my little visit to the Blitzkrieg. There seems to be no moral to this story, and little point, but it is all just as it happened, and I thought it might amuse you.

P.S. I have learned to knit! I finished a sock yesterday, and it looks just like any other sock—amazing! Also I got the beautiful cable from the office saying “happy birthday”, and was all pleased with it. I had a chocolate cake. And I went to look at a bomb crater as a birthday treat.

I have made a few extracts from letters written to me



by my husband from England in the last months of 1940, and the beginning of 1941:

On the way over, we called in at a Canadian port and I dined with some of the priests there. Do you remember the story of the *Jervis Bay*? She was a passenger ship with some guns on her and was convoying some thirty-eight other ships when a German raider appeared. Her captain, Fogarty Fegen, headed her straight for the cruiser. She was, of course, sunk, and the captain and most of the crew were killed. But they delayed the cruiser long enough to let most of the convoy escape. Only four of the thirty-eight were sunk. No braver thing has been done in this war—the Captain of course got the Victoria Cross. I remind you of all this because the priests I dined with mentioned that when his ship was in port, Captain Fegen was a daily communicant and paid a daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament. At the same port we picked up the survivors of the *Jervis Bay* and the other four ships. They were astonishingly cheerful and apparently all looking forward to going to sea again with neither more pleasure nor more apprehension than in peacetime.

In London as in Liverpool, I was surprised at the demeanor of the people. It is impossible to tell from looking at them that there is a war on at all. It does not seem to show in their expression. Further, it seems to me quite extraordinary that I have not heard one angry word about the Germans or even about Hitler. I have no doubt that if I happened to be around immediately after a bomb fell, I should hear many angry words; but the mood is not of anger,

but only of complete determination. Their attitude to the Germans is rather like one's attitude to the plague. One does not get angry with the microbes or resentful; but only determined to stop them. . . .

Everyone is pleased about the Italian débâcle in Libya. But again, one would say that they are amused at Mussolini's predicament rather than exultant. An astonishing people, the English—neither angry nor afraid under bombing, vastly amused in victory—a recipe for "invincibility" perhaps.

It's curious how little time one gets for reflection. I suppose my impressions will sort themselves out later, but at present it's all rather blurred. My principal impression is of sitting endlessly in trains and being sat all over by soldiers and airmen who are the jolliest fellows. But their conversation is exactly what it would have been before the war—had there been conversations in trains then.

London is amazing. Obviously, there must be sections of the city badly banged about, but one doesn't meet them in merely going about one's lawful occasions. My impression is that at the present rate, it would take a century or two to destroy the city.

Gertrude W. remains calm and undisturbed. In the early days when all the tenants were forced to sleep in the basement of the apartment house, she used to sit up all night in the telephone booth for the sake of privacy. People would peer in at her through the glass.

What is most interesting is that the people do not feel that they are doing anything particularly heroic.

They have been told that Americans are full of admiration of their courage. They are quite pleased to be admired, of course, but they obviously feel it's all rather exaggerated. Their own feeling is that they are having a truly luxurious time compared with Poland. The admiration for the Poles passes all bounds.

The thing that would make me despair if I were Hitler is the question one is always hearing asked in a wondering, rather annoyed voice "What does he hope to gain by it?" You hear it even from men looking at the ruins of their utterly demolished homes. It's terrific if you come to think of it. The people whose morale Hitler is trying to smash can't imagine what he's getting at. Their morale is so far beyond his reach that it has never occurred to them that he might be trying to get at *that*.

I wish I had time to tell you of the Sword of the Spirit movement launched by Cardinal Hinsley. His own definition of the movement is that, "It is Catholic Action in the crisis of the war." They are writing and lecturing and talking over the radio, very simply and very profoundly. No shallowness at all. The point of the movement is that national and international affairs are the Christian's close concern, and if we ignore them we fail not merely as citizens, but even as Christians. Some of the best writing Christopher Dawson has ever done has gone into the movement. I can't resist quoting you a slab from his *Dublin Review* article (by the way, the *Dublin Review* under his editorship is splendid): "We can take

part in [the Sword of the Spirit] by prayer, by study and by action. It is not necessary to say much about the first and last of these, for all Catholics understand the importance of prayer and all Englishmen understand the importance of action. But both Catholics and Englishmen are inclined to neglect the second, intellectual, arm and to undervalue the power of thought. The real reason of the success of the new powers that are conquering the world and the failure of Christians to withstand them has been that the former have used the intellectual arm to the fullest extent, however perverted their aim, whereas the Christians have been content with good intentions and sound principles which they have accepted as a matter of course."

They seem to me at once profound and wide-minded, not given to fads and very realistic. I can't write any more about them here, but I'm bringing you all the literature of the movement that I can lay my hands on. They have not only a grasp of the Church's moral teachings on the social order as set out e.g. in the Encyclicals, but real understanding of the social and economic techniques without which the best moral principles will not produce a good social order, but only a well-intentioned mess.

I spoke too soon when I said in an earlier letter I did not see much damage to the face of London. On Saturday afternoon I left the office and went down to Oxford. On Monday morning I came back bright and early to the office and there wasn't any office—just a handful of bricks in a hole. The big incendiary raid of the night before had wiped out most of

Paternoster Row. Of our place nothing at all survived—all our books were destroyed and all our records—we don't even know who owes us money; also we don't know to whom we owe money, but they, doubtless, will tell us.

The only member of the staff to show any sign of emotion was one of our packers, who gave one look and then brought up his breakfast. We are taking another office nearby and hope to be running more or less normally again in a month or two.

## CHAPTER VI

# An American in the Blitz

BEATRICE WARDE is a distinguished typographer and director of publications for the Monotype Corporation in England. Since the war broke out she has steadily refused to return to America for fear she might find herself unable to get back again to England. She does great work in conveying to those in England who most need it generous help from her friends and relations in the States. What this help means is expressed in the last letter printed here addressed to a group of these friends.

Mrs. Warde's conception of the civilisation endangered by Hitler is specially bound up with her profession and is reflected in several of these letters. It is centered in the *word*—to her the destruction of books and the attack on ideas are the worst of the Nazi horrors: Hitler is managing to attack not only the Christian values of St. Augustine but the poetic and artistic values of Petrarch—the Church and the Renaissance together.

Speaking of civilian courage she longs for Chesterton to play on the words Civilian, Civility and Civilisation. And she sees those words and those values leading her directly to the Catholic Church.

When I met Beatrice Warde she was living in a lovely oak-beamed house called Old Straddles in a village midway between Redhill and Horley. She had come often, unknown by me, into our little church to hear Mass, and had had some preliminary conversation with Father Barry

about reception into the Catholic Church. Meanwhile she could and would play the organ in our church.

It was in May 1940 and she told me that the war had made her feel she could no longer stand on the side-lines.

She was reading, thinking, praying, against the background of the Blitz during the nine months of her instruction—an unusual experience for a neophyte.

All these letters except the last are written to her mother Mrs. Lamberton Becker, of the New York *Herald Tribune*.

May 30

We're far from the railway here, but at night it is possible to hear, every hour or so, a train passing. You can follow the sound of it northward or southward for as much as a minute, and then it's all quiet again. But last night, reading in bed, I became aware that I was noting something unusual subconsciously, and it turned out to be that the train rumbling sound had been continuous for a long time. Before one could die away northwards, another was coming along from the south. Train after train, going fast. I lay and listened with a grateful heart. Even if many of them were, must have been, hospital trains; even if the rest were filled with men who hadn't closed their eyes for seven nights and days in Flanders: still every train-load was one more to count, of those who had somehow got out of the trap, who had got through the ports, whose transports hadn't been sunk by all those thuddings off the southeast. We've had to look at the map, recently, as you've been doing; and it kept saying encirclement. But by the Lord's help—and apparently with incredibly gallant work

along the flanks—some are still getting out. I can still hear the trains; and a wireless bulletin, this evening, confirmed what I had mercifully been allowed to hear with my own ears and deduce, twenty-four hours ahead.

Friday, May 31: Today I went up to town to register Old Straddles as my address in place of Grosvenor Road. It's a mere formality for Americans but all aliens have to have written permission to spend the night away from their registered address. London is full of cheerful-faced soldiers, and overhead those enchanting piglets of barrage balloons browse in the sky. From one end they look like fat fish but from the other end they're simply Disney pigs. Had some cordial talk with a couple of nice policemen at the station. One of them has a girlfriend working as a nurse on a hospital ship which the Germans were just prevented from sinking, and they tried hard. "They say 'propaganda'", said this Bobby, "but she was *there*." It reminded me of S.M.'s conclusion, that the only thing left to debunk was the gospel of debunking, which had become no more than a technique of disbelief, practised by the Haw-haws for their own ends and welcomed by the escapists. . . .

. . . . .

In peace-time that visitation would probably have led X. into very drastic conclusions about the Almighty, and even I would have been struck pretty dumb by it. Instead, he's actually fumbling with, or toward, some notion of trusting God—though all the *words* in which he could express it are words that his



town-planning man-trusting Wellsian set have blown scorn upon for years. And as for me, I came back from holding his hand without a trace of that sense of having pumped out one's own resources and sympathy that I might have felt. The pump-and-vat metaphor doesn't hold now; we aren't simply allowed to store so much vitality and caritas and dole it out; we're pipe-lines from the ocean now. I was able to make a note, on the way back, which I pass on to you; it's all wrong to let an experience like that be wasted. Does that sound cold-blooded? Perhaps, but never mind; the fact is that these two members of the intelligentsia came bang up against a realisation of what the power of faith could accomplish by itself—just human, united faith in something, divorced from religion. When T. told me that they'd been asking themselves "What do we believe in as much as the Nazis believe in Hitler—for what single faith are we witnessing?" I couldn't start explaining all about it, especially when the words had been denied their meanings; but I knew that anyone who could get as far as asking that question, without going on to see that there was nothing in between faith-in-the-state and faith-in-God—without realising that the first really does *depend* on absolutely "united action" by "the masses", whereas the second gives the individual *something to do about it at once* without waiting for everybody to get in step—such a person might well crack up either mentally or spiritually. There mustn't *be* these crack-ups among the people who think they have to keep thinking. They must be warned that the Lord doesn't *expect*

anybody to think things out, but if they *do* insist on doing it, they must take the through train and not stop off on the way-station of despair. They can use words if that's their gift, but they mustn't blunt those edge-tools by hacking at the wrong thing—and then throw away the spoilt tools and keep grabbing up fresh ones. This would sound like the merest preachment to so many people who don't even know what "despair" is despair *of*, in its proper sense and in its proper cadre among the seven deadly sins. But then most people can't get *any* idea until it's worked out as something they can touch, or something that can touch them. The philosophers try to put it in abstract terms ahead of time precisely because those statements *don't* break bones, whereas the little concrete corollaries so often do. Well anyway, you and I have made the intellectual journey as a through trip, and it's brought us right back under the shadow of the protective arms.

June 1st, Sat.

I've been cosseted in every possible way, and just by way of gilding the lily, allowed to feel quite the little heroine, with promises of just those physical risks which exalt the mind and take away the sting of vicarious suffering. You can be pretty sure that a good proportion of this country has been down on its knees these last few days trying to formulate some sort of promise to the Lord that any bomb that falls anywhere *else* than on the B.E.F. can fall *anywhere* else it likes. And those people have all risen up free from the personal fear of death and disablement.

Some of them will have their blank cheques filled in and cashed by the Lord. My own blank cheque has been pushed off onto a corner of the crowded table where it's not at all likely to be picked up and honoured, but by golly, it's grand to know it's there and boldly signed; and somehow we know that the Assets are safer on the table. Anybody who gets bumped in any *mêlées* with old Adolf needn't worry about theological technicalities. Those will remain for the survivors to grapple with if Adolf wins this round; for if he does, he'll soon start a persecution of any kind of belief that puts God above the State, and it will be so important to be perfectly *clear* about the issues that we shall all have to become Catholics so as not to have to do a lot of explaining about where we stand. I shall certainly do so, if only for the one reason that in those times there would be none of this all-together-for-glory atmosphere, this *ease* with which moral and physical dangers can be correlated, this spiritual moratorium in which the unbaptised Holy Innocents and the Good Thief form the Heavenly Reception Committee, and the dullest ingrate is allowed to give God something valuable, if only a little suffering in fortitude. But after this phase is over, *whichever* side wins, it's bound to be a "trying" (in the literal sense) time for anyone who believes in the individual human soul and its rights . . .

Still that time is not yet; and meanwhile we're excused from worrying. How it turns out is God's affair. The sun shines, the honeysuckle is drenching the garden with its scent, and the first roses are coming out, and there are masses of cinnamon pinks

along the front path. A house-martin has built her nest under the eaves that overhang the front door, and now squats on her eggs almost within arm's reach as you come in. I'm sunning myself on the lawn, and Mr. Gillett, who is spending this Sunday afternoon gardening after a very heavy week, has just watched 3 planes go by and shouted "*Hullo, those are Curtises!*" So I cheered.

June 6

The most wonderful tales are coming in about the Dunkirk embarkation, and they've acted as a tremendous tonic to the civilians, for this was one time when a man didn't need a uniform to be a hero. Grizzled old masters of tug-boats, lads with row-boats, men at the Labour Exchanges, yacht owners—they all had their chance to jump into the thick of it at five minutes' notice. Even if the invitation hadn't stressed the extreme danger involved, they would have known what that incessant shudder-and-throb detonation from across the channel meant: and a thousand of those little amateur and merchant and pleasure vessels went charging off instantly, under no specific orders save to get as many men back as each boat would hold. Where a big ship was being bombed or machine-gunned, the little motor-boats and row-boats would charge in to be ready to pick up the survivors from the water. Did you hear about the stoker who came up for a breath of air, lay on deck with a Bren gun, brought down a bomber with it, and then went back to his stoke-

hole? The merchant navy has been acquiring glory all these months, and for a long time any little trawler or tramp steamer nosing into the Pool has been gazed at with a new respect; but now by golly we all have to look respectfully at every Saucy Sue and Skylark that takes trippers out for a sail at Eastbourne. The very rowboats in Regent's Park are putting on the airs of battleships, as well they may. Some of—indeed all of—those side-wheelers we saw from the balcony at Greenwich were over there performing prodigies, and the Margate Queen went down. There were plenty of civilians among the rescued too. A friend of Mrs. Ellis's who had been running a café in Ostend got away with his wife and children and an invalid mother, without anything more than the clothes they had on, and their ship was bombed at all the way over, and they twice had to take to the boats. They arrived cool as cucumbers, penniless, and glad to be alive. In fact it was the least exclusive episode in English history. Even women and children can say they were represented at the scene of action, and right along with the Navy, Army and Air Force were the good old Messers-About-in-Boats showing the stuff they're made of.

June 7

This war [has] solved all my problems and put meaning and significance into Life and Death. . . . If I had a grown up mind I should feel awfully guilty or at least conscious of all this profiting by others' losses. But I think I take rather the child's

attitude nowadays. I have the right to. All my grown-up scruples went on Abyssinia, China, Spain—when it seemed as if we might buy peace by those sufferings of others. That was a guilty feeling if you like, but nowadays there's no time and no great reason for slashing at one's nerves. . . .

*Sunday*

This morning I acquitted myself fairly well at the organ. That's another thing I always wanted to do—take a congregation through the Missa de Angelis. It's a thrill, and this time I didn't shed more than a pint of perspiration.

*Monday*

It looks as if we might have that test-of-faith that we didn't have last time when the Germans were nearing Paris. Remember that when all the material causes for hope disappear, one has a chance to hope for hope's sake, which is really worth doing. Any fool can hope for a likelihood.

I suppose there's only one time when human beings can get one degree beyond human comprehension, and that's when they see *that they can't* see everything. *God* can see how much we don't understand, and in the very act of perceiving and admitting a Mystery we get just a momentary glimpse of ourselves through his eyes. This is all a great Mystery, what's happening now.

June 18

*What* a day this has been [It was the day of France's collapse and they had all been waiting breathlessly for Churchill's formal assurance that England would

fight on]. And I've left out the best thing of all. This evening before 9, when I didn't know what in the world Churchill would say, I rang up the assistant parish priest at Redhill and told him I thought highly of [the Catholic Church] mainly because it was rather careful about Meanings of Words, also because it was very definite and very stubborn: so I wanted to be able to sign on. This Father Crowley is evidently an extremely well-educated man and witty withal; he rose to it like a trout and we had a most amusing phone conversation, and I am turning up for instruction on Wednesdays. It takes ages of course, and you have to keep selling 'em the idea you want it, because they'd rather keep you outside in the Elysian Fields of invincible ignorance than let you in and then have you lapsing.

August 4, 1940

Tell Maisie Ward that today I not only played the organ but also sang the whole of the Proper, the young Frenchman having joined the army. And, probably for the first time in that church, the offertorium, *Precatus est Moyses* (which you may remember on a Solesmes record) was rendered in its own neums. I don't, however, approve of women singing such essentially virile stuff; when I'm a bit more fledged, I shall offer to train a couple of the local lads, and present them with my Solesmes records to study. I shall do nothing so cheeky until I am an insider, and then not rashly. A nice girl of eighteen and I are all that now constitute the Choir, as there's been much coming and going; but the congregation

bellow out lustily, perhaps to drown out the organ, so all is well in Zion. . . .

It's funny, but every time Adolf H. says to us in effect, "You shall die, tiddy-om-pom, you shall die," I think of some new way of cheating him—for of course he's talking to Petrarch and St. Augustine. (Come to think of it, he's the only man in history that has ever tried to get those two strange bedfellows on one deathbed.) I always did have a lot of venom in my makeup and I do enjoy cheating that dirty dog by helping words to escape, before he can get his paws on them.

This week-end has been perfect—hot yet fresh, cloudless sky, everything smelling of midsummer and meadowsweet. Yesterday I took Bobby and went woodgathering. That forest on the hill is a beauty, complete with quite a wide Lost Road, all overgrown and mossy, where spotted Orchis grows in profusion.

The "Come on, damn you," attitude grows in strength, so much so that Adolf's newest attempt to undermine morale is to dishearten people with the notion that there may not be an invasion. What people here want him to go on saying is that he intends to get crowned at the Abbey on August 25th, and all that; for they are longing to crown him. (I trust that the censor, and any Nazis who may steal this letter off your desk, are familiar with the American vernacular.) Meanwhile we keep spitting on our hands and pawing the earth, and it's all very stimulating. If you come across anybody in America referring to Great Britain in the past tense, let 'em have it!



August 29

Last night, as soon as I got back here after dinner, I sat down to write you the day's thrills, finishing up with S.M.'s special congratulatory phone-call. I hadn't stopped to breathe since I'd charged back into the waiting lift at Gordon House with my nose in your letter, the cuttings in my hand, and a brief-bag under my arm into which Peggy had hastily thrust an envelope containing other correspondence. Having put my letter on paper I took a satisfied yawn of air and then began exploring my brief-bag for work. The sirens had just marked "parenthesis" with their curving sound-pencils; and believe me, within those brackets in Time one can really get some work done. At any minute the "All Clear" may mark "close paren." and restore one to the world in which appointments have to be kept, telephone-calls answered, street-costume worn, even a certain amount of worrying done, or at least enquiring, about the safety of friends in outlying suburbs. None of that comes within the Parenthesis. It is the perfect Alibi, both in the correct and the common sense of the word; one really *is* "somewhere else" than within the normally-universal reach of Responsibility. There's no point even in feeling angry at any distance-muffled booms which may well be adroit salvos of A.A. fire. Every writer quite instinctively longs for insulation when the young sprouts of ideas are showing; but as you've pointed out so well, people who dive into private mental shelters simply for individual, personal reasons are cheating at a game in which cheating's penalized. The Command to Take Shelter *must* come from the Outside, from "authority"—whether it is

the vocation that orders a contemplative into a cell, or the banshee-howl with which the Local Authority (O good phrase) orders me to pull down the blinds, forget the telephone, seek a safe place, and for *social reasons* become as a little child in genuine Unconcern; to put up only those brief, almost formal little prayers for the brave wings overhead that a perfectly trustful heart would utter in sheer courtesy; to send out only one quick blessing over all the dogged little villas that will be shaking their chimney-pots at the sky like fists and beckoning-down the bomb intended for the gas-works, the moment that their People are safely out of the rooms and across the garden and into the Anderson shelter. These courtesies observed, Individual Conscience can gravely inspect the rest of the order from Society in Authority, which is, to shed concern like clothing, to *feel* sheltered and to *be* cheerful. The order is then personally countersigned by Conscience and goes into effect forthwith. And for people who have articles to write there's nothing like it in the world. It's a shame it can't be synthetically produced to order; more good stuff, certainly more honest and scrupulous stuff, would be turned out. For one thing, Messrs. Publisher & Public Inc. seem unusually far off whereas the Great Reader is bending right over the copy.

Now this is not just a little essay on Life Between the Brackets. It's quite true that I need to put down what I know is true while I'm in a position to test the sound of it on paper, as one never quite believes these things after it's all over: but in addition to that I've indicated the solid basis for two assumptions which we are now going to mount. And rest-

ing on the top of those two assumptions, like a plank on two bricks, will be one of the most impressive compliments that you as an author have received from a reader, or as a Dickens-biographer from a Dickensian.

The first of the two things which I don't simply ask you to believe, but tell you why you can believe, is that the critical faculties are not diffused but sharpened under shelter. The difference between honest and dishonest, deft and clumsy, "right" and "wrong," is much easier to perceive. The other thing is that unless the text is absolutely enthralling, Conscience (busying itself for once on the near-at-hand) begins rapping on the writing desk. The tug-against-print is ten times stronger than usual; any printed words that don't even let you feel that tug are masterly well written.

And now I can go back to the point in my narrative where I fished out that parcel and *Whoops*, it was the galleys of your *Introducing Charles Dickens*. Upon my word, I was going to take a look-through those sheets, to get the taste in type of passages that I'd several times read-aloud from the typescript. That's all I was going to do. Hah! This was about 9.45, and at 2 this morning I realized that I was probably the only person in London (except for those on night-shifts) who was sitting up for reasons not at all directly connected with the sirens. I tell you I would have known if there had been a false syllable in that book. I tell you that you have yourself put Dickens there so clearly that even a new-comer reader would know a false syllable (if there were one) by the very truth of the rest. By heaven,

you *have* been in presence of C. D. It isn't a set of opinions about him, it's Dickens leaping whole with his eyes flashing. At this point I begin to save time and paper, for surely you must know how good that book is technically. You hardly even need me to point out that it is uncannily as if Dickens had made up his mind to "get through" to-be-where-he-was-needed, to sign up once more on the right side. That "power" which you made the recurring theme of the book, and all the other qualities of the man that are so far from being conventionally English, are just precisely what's needed to balance Phlegm and Fortitude in such a scrap as this. And will be needed in America when the time comes. So I say that you have done signal service with that book; war service in the World Civil War, spiritual service in the spiritual and mental line-up, morale service. That book's coming out at a bad-time-for-books; and some of the people who review it will know-too-much-and-not-enough about Dickens, and in any case won't be reading it in tranquillity. So I'm very glad that none of these things will make any difference to the book's life and services—which I think will continue as long as there are Dickens readers and I think the Great Reader agrees; I sensed Him nodding appreciatively about every third sentence, at something particularly up His alley. . . .

Bodies go down, souls go up, to get out of reach. *Altissimum posuisti refugium tuum*. We're above 'em, say the Spitfire pilots, coasting along the ceiling; now to dive on their tails.

All this to say that you've written a brilliant and

great book to good purpose, and that you must go on writing.

We've been having "lulls" recently: trouble with them is that nobody knows till the next morning whether Jerry is concentrating on some other town or staying at home. Most people have, I think, discovered (if only subconsciously) the absolutely sure cure for personal funk, which is to think of one's personal surroundings as not-a-hospital, or not-a-munitions-factory, or not-Mr.-Churchill, or some other place or person that the angel might point out to you, saying, "I take it you prefer it should land there?" This attitude is not quite the same thing as tempting Providence, which means trying to drive a bargain with God to one's own benefit. And yet there's a bargaining angle to it—and I think a legitimate one. In such times as these "the country" becomes a real entity, and does a certain amount of the individual's thinking and feeling for him: and it's "the country," thinking through individual minds, that makes so many of the bombed-out families take genuine comfort in remembering what their packet was aimed at. I can tell you what the motto of this war is: it's the formula that the common people devised for their own consolation and inspiration the minute the trouble started. "We're all in this together." I have heard it a dozen times used as spiritual first aid. It means all sorts of things, infinitely more than that silly crack about there being "no longer any civilians." You have only to compare these two phrases to see how curiously old-fashioned the second one is. It's true only in a Larger

Sense, and it depends for its effect on the wicked habit of assuming that a given thing is "mere." The country now knows damn well that there are civilians, now that they've shown what the word can mean. Oh if Chesterton were only here to drive home the connection between Civilian, Civility and Civilization! At any rate the civilian's own slogan shifts the emphasis from his part to the whole: and you know how excited I get at every fresh hint that *that* is what the 20th century is really doing, recovering the Sense of the Whole. I don't want to get mystical about this but it does look as if Analysis and Synthesis were going to change places now. There will always be those two powers in the human mind, there will always be people who make things in order to find out something, but from now on there will be more people who find out things in order to make something, because the emphasis is shifting to their object. All this talk of "planning" started long before the war: the word "organic" began to crop up in the unlikeliest places: the Catholic Church, I find, developed its doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ in newly explicit terms. Then came little Adolf as if to show that the devil could play that tune too, and make people march to it. And now here's The Times asking if it's any good thinking of a postwar world in which protective legislation by one country of Europe can ruin the factories or farmers of another: and the Little Men flogging themselves on with "we're all in this together." It all seems to add up to something.

What a pleasure it is to go to church these days. In one respect I have the drop on you, for I have

the additional pleasure of knowing that the same actual words are being uttered at that moment in every country in the world where it's not yet noon, and that they will sweep around the globe on the wings of the morning. But swanking aside, isn't it lovely to be where the basic assumptions are all sound and the human soul is treated as something worthy of respect and attention? I almost think that what I like most of all about Christianity is that it just hasn't any use for the word "mere." Nothing is mere. I trust your tabernacle goes in for the feast of the Immaculate Conception: brooding on that doctrine can be very reviving to the spirit. We all want to have the power of wholly willing a thing, and we just haven't got it, and it's nice to think that for once in the world there was a human being who had a perfectly unimpaired, or as they say, unstained, soul that was still a hundred-percent human soul. And a woman at that. John the Baptist was born without stain of original sin, and everybody, I gather, gets rid of it in baptism, but that one woman, so they say, never had it at all: couldn't have, else she'd never have had the will to say "Be it done" at the moment when everything depended on her meaning it absolutely.

I wish I could say that "coming home" described my feeling about joining the Catholic Church. Actually I feel much more at home with the pagans, above all the ancient Greeks. Nothing that they do surprises me: I'm a born fatalist, omens and oracles are as comfortable to me as a dressing-gown, and this is the first year in which a carefully built up belief in the immortality of the soul hasn't been knocked

to nothing by one touch of mortal peril. Of course I'm only splitting hairs here, for I know what the phrase means and there's a great deal in it. And in one special sense it's true, because any place where I can be sure of finding my mother *is* home, and I find you there all over the place. So many qualities that you possess in an outstanding degree are lauded, symbolized and related to human figures. As for the Magnificat, it almost might be you talking. Just your combination of humility, pride and delight in seeing the humble exalted. I'm glad the Blessed Virgin Mary knocked off such a good bit of copy while she was about it.

I've been collecting reactions to *Introducing Charles Dickens*. Peggy told me she very rarely cries over a book, but there was a quality of love and understanding for *London* running through it that it seemed just like a message and drew grateful tears. Tony (whom I'd never have known but for Mrs. Todgers) said with awe, "She can produce any effect she wants with her use of words, she makes you see and feel precisely what she intends," which is just about the highest praise of literary craftsmanship. He says you've got Dickens all right.

I should suggest that the copies go to the Mobile Canteens and Shelter work of the American War Relief, because they're doing *fine* work here among the bombed-out Cratchits and Linkinwaters, and there's something about that side of it that just supplements or complements the ambulance work. My heavens, Dickens is the only man I know who wouldn't have to be relieved at the end of the thirty-minute shift in which the "listeners" take turns. (Do



you know about them? It's part of first aid for people who don't have to go to the hospital. They come dazed and must have plenty of warm sweetened liquid and no solid food; and the recovery from the slight case of surgical shock is shown by the need to talk it out. They must tell somebody about it, and somebody must listen. And as they all say the same thing more or less, and it's more a psychological treatment than a communion of ideas, the same thing happens to the "listeners" that happens to a military guard when he has to stand with bowed head watching feet, feet, feet passing a catafalque. See Kipling. Or else it's just that they get drained.) Anyway C. D. has intimate friends in those Rest Centres and we must help him to send comfort to them.

You may want to expand the Foreword for this edition. Remember that English readers are now capable of noticing with delight that Mrs. Gamp still has a window to lean out of, and that Poll Sweedlepipe's shop down below hasn't had to be weather-boarded. In this book they can go with Dickens the man through streets now connected in their thoughts with sights which have a peculiarly shocking effect upon those who take inspiration, as he did, from Tidiness. A bombed building is just a sort of Reduction to the Obscene of the look of untidiness. He never saw those wanton Mare's-Nests, but neither do we see things that set him flaming with a very similar rage: the point is that the good rage was there, the quick spirit was there. Nobody will ever be able to follow the living Dickens, on his prowls through London, who can ever be tricked

even for a moment into loss of pride in humanity through some glimpse of what human beings can sink to. One must look where he looked: into common human faces. He helps us to see what he saw in them—lit up the clearer by disastrous fires. He . . . I'm just rambling on and have got away from the point but while I think of it, one reason why so few authors as distinct from journalists have been able to do justice to the scenes of England 1940 is that they are melodramatic, grotesque, the sort of thing that can't be handled with the tongue in the cheek. The ability to take a bit of melodrama in one's stride and not instinctively steer clear of it is an ability that we're just beginning to appreciate, having some use for it nowadays. I love C. D. when he's saying, "This is wild, weird, and dramatically juicy: Come on Boys!" For as we now know the alternative is to say: "This is all a nightmare."

I'd almost go so far as to say that there's as much to be learned about present-day Londoners from a careful study of Trotty Veck, Gabriel Vardon, Charley and Tom and others as there is in the newspapers. After all the news is scarcely credible, and C. D. makes it perfectly credible because he gets under the surface of mereness. Nowadays Will Fern and Lillian are constantly descending on Toby, and it isn't only that the poor help the poor, it's that the Tobies *do* have the tact not to care for rashers in such circumstances.

Well, here I am back at the hotel, and very glad to be here. I write from the grill room where I'm having dinner. No coffee for me tonight. The Lullaby

Barrage is due to start any minute now, and we Londoners take our sleep very seriously. The one thing I've got against this grill room is that the swing door into the kitchen has a slightly rusty hinge. You may think that's carping, but lady, when a waiter pushes open that door and lets it thump-to after him, the thing goes Teeioo . . . Boump, causing the latest-arrived diner to look up quickly and wonder where *that* one landed.

I must say I think whistling bombs are a jolly good idea, if one must have bombs. Round at the Outpost last Friday, we heard one—the whole West End heard it—and really, in between the beginning of the *Teeiou* and the Bang there's time to get away from the window, calculate how near it's coming and if necessary (in this case it wasn't) make a dive under a table. Many and many a life and limb and whole skin has been saved from under a table in this Citizen's War, with half the house on top of the table. On this occasion the Americans in Britain Outpost erupted with some agility from their small office, waited on the extremely solid staircase to make sure that the 'stick' was exhausted, then caught up a portable typewriter and all work-in-hand and proceeded to the basement shelter, a most admirably buttressed stronghold with all the safety devices that anyone could ask. Here the work proceeded with new gusto. . . .

While I was at Grosvenor House I took advantage of a non-warning period to send you a night letter and as I poised the wet pen over the form wondering what to say, I heard the reception clerk saying to a guest, "Well, sir, what's Democracy but taking pot

luck all together, even this way?" I handed that clerk my cable a minute later, saying, "You just made a profound remark which will probably go further than you realize." He's right: there's just one bond of brotherhood for mankind—danger. We're all in mortal danger all the time, and we've all got to die some time. Civilization and peace tend to make us ignore that bond; and nowadays few people are brought up to believe that the greatest possible danger is mortal sin. But it was danger, physical danger, that made human beings conceive of a larger unit than the wandering family—tribe-unit. I agree with all their Holinesses that the family is the largest *natural* unit of Man; i.e. that anything larger is in the nature of an experiment dependent on the *will* to co-operate as a unit, that is, on intellectual consent, with reference to over-riding principles of justice. And it seems to me that that *will*, having been born of a sense of danger, is quite likely to depend for its continuance on the continued sense of Danger. Take away the notion that sin is the supreme danger, then spread the idea that Civilization can be taken for granted and that everybody's going to live to be 101 in perfect safety "some day," and it seems to me that the bonds of any society are bound to weaken. Then you get what we got here during the general strike: the concept of the "workers" opposed to an entirely different and older concept called "The Public" or "Everybody."

September 22, 1940

He said something which I've felt myself, but I hadn't realized that it was a fairly general feeling:

"Somehow I can't feel so sorry for the people as I do for the buildings." I knew just what he meant. All a building has got is its decency; it hasn't a human soul to dignify even the worst-wounded body, or to escape to God if it comes to that. Its whole personality is in its structure, and when it gets a direct hit it passes instantly from something meant to outlast its owners, something proud and secretive, into something disintegrated and obscene. In the oldest meaning of the word, obscene; every city street is a sort of stage-setting, and these sprawling bricks, timbers and chunks of coping-stone look like the sort of action that should have taken place off stage.

At any rate we heard the King and were all deeply moved by his speech and the way he spoke it. I can't tell you what it's meant to London to have the King and Queen constantly visiting, popping in to public shelters, comparing notes with *other* owners of damaged property, lifting the kettle-lids in the emergency kitchens, sending blankets, listening to neighborhood sagas of heroism. It's the old, old alliance between King and Commoner. They'll always stand by each other. We cheered the announcement of the George Cross. The fact that it ranks only second to the V.C. is most important. It gives the Civilian that prestige which he's so well earning in this Civilian's Battle for Civilization. The children are getting their "prestige" more than ever since those Holy Innocents went down in mid-Atlantic. Fathers look at their children and think "They, too, would behave like that if they had to."

Forgive me for going back to this point of a previous letter, but isn't it wonderful how honour shares

itself out? Half a regiment is wiped out in some gallant action, and forever after men are honoured for belonging to that regiment. See also that lovely translation of the "proficiscere" in Newman's *Dream of Gerontius*. "In the name of patriarchs and prophets," etc., a man who has fought extra well leaves a "name" for others to wear as a badge. When some hero gets the Keys of the City, all the citizens of that town get honour. Yes, and it didn't do Europe any good at all to discard, to a great extent, the notion that any human being, however vile, shared in the general compliment conferred in the stable at Bethlehem; or that women as such, and mothers in particular, could as a category produce the Blessed Virgin.

Oh, that reminds me: *do* read Karl Adam's "The Spirit of Catholicism." I don't mean rush off and read it straight away, but get hold of it (from Mr. Sheed) and promise me you'll sooner or later read it. He makes almost no annoying Bland Assumptions; if you open the book in the middle, you may find him assuming things that you don't, but you can safely accept those things for the sake of argument because he really has started from scratch. It's a wonderful book. Lord, to think that a German could have written it! And yet, the Germans, like the English, have a natural bent to piety. The grim-faced young men who are at this moment making throbbing noises overhead, on their way to drop destruction on whatever little villa they happen to hit in London, would never be risking that barrage on purely personal motives. Somebody took away God Incarnate and gave them the State Incarnate, and I suppose that pleased them better because they've

never been completely civilized, but at any rate, they go at their acts of worship with vigour, and serve Satan with piety. It's tragic because they haven't individually sold their souls to the devil, they've *been* sold! But doesn't it all illuminate this notion of tolerancel Technically this country's defending Tolerance as a principle. Actually, it's learning to distinguish the tolerable from the distinctly and admittedly intolerable. In other words it's seeing evil and absolutely refusing to tolerate it. These people won't have it that a country with more bombers is more right, because more likely to succeed. And yet, when you come to think of it, a consistently tolerant person might well "let Fate decide." Who is he to condemn a side that doesn't happen to be on his side? etc. But the English *are* condemning in fury; thence, they are forced to condemn on moral grounds. "Oh, it's wicked" is the antiphon to every story of destruction.

The Braver New Post-War World, whatever it turns out to be, is going to be different from what we expect. The Lord won't be satisfied until we're all of us right down flat on our stomachs, no longer telling Him where He gets off, but taking orders! All sorts of humble people will be raised up out of the very stones of the earth to do his work in that day. There's some *basic* change coming: I can smell it. Things are going to be so different that language will be profoundly affected—because most of our words depend on basic assumptions of the past 500 years that are now, well, perhaps slogans, but no longer simply part of the air and the common taken-for-granted. I grant you it'll be enormously interesting

to a speculative mind, and not too dreadful for anybody who can believe that God is good even if he has to alter a lot of his personal prejudices in order to go on believing it. But it will be a tantalizing time to anybody who wants to see the whole thing through with his human eyes.

Meanwhile—ah, meanwhile! We are creating a *fund* for those poor creatures to draw upon—those post-war people who are now the Token-bearers. They'll know that certain things are real because we *made* them real, the behaviour of London and Liverpool and other English cities in this past month has proved something. The proof may lie around for a long, long time while all sorts of other things are being proved, but the witness is there. Not one little child that's been killed has died in vain.

You won't ever forget that these are days of glory, *real* glory of which the reality consists in the realness of danger. Nowadays the hotels, office buildings, etc., hang up a sign in the doorway to let people know whether the period is one of All Clear, or Alert (between warning and all-clear) or Danger, which means that the spotters on the roof have sent down word that "they're overhead." Today six of us at the outpost adjourned for lunch when the Danger klaxon went off, and went across the street to a good (underground) grill room in Bush House, and had to wait for a lot of traffic as usual; and were very glad that no shell-fragments were falling (indeed, we wouldn't have gone out if they had been).

The human mind *ought* to be in a state of "Alert" most of the time, and if it doesn't have its "Danger" periods, it's being cheated. Catholicism is the only



system of thought that recognizes this—having inherited it direct from the days when they expected the Son of Man to rip the heavens open almost any minute. The Catholics represent the human soul as constantly under bombardment, by Temptation, and they have the courage to say that the soul is in *real* danger, *mortal* peril, from sin. A Catholic lives in a continual state of “Alert” (which immensely sharpens the senses and makes life gloriously enjoyable) with frequent periods that the klaxon of conscience announces as “Danger.” All this crude bombing business is only an imperfect (but illuminating) *analogy* for the normal adventures of the human soul.

Old Straddles, Oct. 16, 1940

This morning’s eight o’clock news bulletin started off with the simple announcement that London had had the heaviest air raid of the war. The effect of this on the Rest of England was almost audible—to anyone who had become accustomed to the usual vague formula about “some damage” and “a number of casualties.” Certainly anyone who has spent a number of Bad Nights in London, and has fixed on this or on that one as the Worst, will have a good deal of head start in imagining what last night was worse *than*. My own imagination would be pretty busy in that direction now if I hadn’t set it a number of tasks of my own devising—practical homework tasks that will leave it little time for thumb nail-sketches of things that may not have happened.

This (writing to you) is one of them. I have a fairly obedient imagination, I find. Last night it

produced for me a rather good set of illustrations (in modern dress) of the psalm *Qui Habitat in Ad-jutorio*, which I recited to it, leaning over the half-door and looking at the sky over London. It was the night of the Hunter's Moon. I could see every rose along the back-garden pathway. The sound of bombers passing overhead had kept on and kept on and still kept on. London is so vast that even at this distance you'd have to turn your head slightly to see a shell-burst over its western, or eastern outskirts, if you'd been looking at a parachute-flare somewhere in the centre. The moon had drowned out almost all the stars, and the bomber-drone was drowning out all sounds of the barrage. There was one pink stain of fire, not spreading. The shell-flashes have the effect of someone saying, "DAMN you, DAMN—DAMN you." They are so quick that if they weren't bright enough to leave an after-image on the retina (as lightning does) they would be invisible.

Little old Imagination, hurriedly searching its files for a few recent impressions to use as source-material, came upon a pretty vivid one of that section of the Times building which by now you've seen in photographs. It then dug up yesterday's German announcement via Rome that they were going to concentrate on newspaper offices in London this time, despite the Berlin explanation of how The Times happened to come out to time the next morning and look utterly unconcerned ("of course, it's really produced in the country").

Now as S. M. and B. W. were both sleeping at that office last night, in the part that wasn't hit, I thought I'd better step in and give the little picture-

painter a useful job of work to do, as he seemed to be in an energetic mood. So I fed him "Qui Habitat" phrase by phrase. In that moon-dusk with the busy prowlers overhead, I had a ready made image for "*a negotio perambulante in tenebris.*" That's a great and neglected advantage of the Latin tongue, that it *has to be* translated, in any event (mentally), so it can quite naturally and with no sense of impropriety be given a topical translation. Take "*susceptor meus es tu, et refugium meum.*" You don't have first to turn "susceptor" into "guardian" and then turn "guardian" into whatever specific image you want—roof-spotter, A.R.P. warden, fireman, anybody who has been raised to the dignity of an Image of the Mercy of God in the eyes of Londoners. Similarly, if you start with the English word "refuge," you still have to turn it into "shelter," and even then you're conscious of only having found a synonym: but "refugium" can be turned direct into "shelter." That's something we tend to forget about those scores of editions of the Bible in the vernaculars that appeared after the invention of typography and before Luther. I don't think it had occurred to anybody then (except the English, who had rather disgraced themselves in that direction) that a vernacular Bible was anything more than—well, the sort of thing that "The Shelter in Bedlem" was: an attempt to "bring it home" in the common jargon of the moment, a dramatic, homely paraphrase, permitted and encouraged despite its obviously temporary nature *because* everyone knew where to go and look up what the *textus receptus* really said. And how

did they know that the Vulgate was the correct text, and that the Church had figured out the correct meanings and connotations? Because they all agreed that the Holy Ghost, or whoever had kept that institution and its archives going all that time, wouldn't be so mean as to allow the Church to make any serious blunders in interpretation. On the principle that even a human man doesn't allow his wife to make a fool of herself in public if he loves her: a fortiori that the Bride of Christ, given the job of teaching and interpreting with the promise "I won't let you down," would have been nudged the right way in any case of doubt. The Bride expected (and still expects) her serious students to take the trouble to learn her international language, or rather her own notion of the Vulgar Tongue: but never as a mother-tongue, because almost every word of mother-tongue has a concrete image or physical first-hand association to it, and that means a lot of extra confusion when there are eternal things and principles to be discussed. Take for instance: "Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked." If that means (coming after "a thousand shall fall") "you'll be the sole survivor" it doesn't in the Hebrew—I've been through it with Peggy. It seems to mean "You'll only be looking at, and not involved in, the retribution." But there's more bite in "*Verumtamen* (nevertheless) *oculis tuis considerabis, et retributionem peccatorum videbis*," and it falls straight into "For all that, you will be able to look thoughtfully with your own eyes and see for yourself what will happen to the Nazis."

Brand Hall,  
Shropshire

November 11, 1940

It's like a dream being here. Time is marked off by the silvery bell of the stable clock, but it's all one unbroken All Clear Interval to me. You can see, but not hear, the approach of night. To me, a windy autumn twilight without siren-wails will always seem incomplete, and I'd willingly start a movement for retaining the Dawn All Clear as a permanent memorial of this war.

"Why do they sound that whistle at daybreak, mummy?" "Well, because once everybody was glad of it."

This is a William-and-Mary red brick country house with cows on the front lawn which is half a mile square with old trees on it. I sleep in a bed that was slept in by Charles I, probably before they fitted it with a spring mattress. You can imagine the lovely atmosphere of any house that has Mrs. Lowndes and Elizabeth living in it, and this one also has four of the loveliest little children in the world. I've done nothing at all but rest and enjoy myself since I arrived on Friday night, and this is Monday. I've looked at a lot of papers and half-finished articles, and haven't even sorted them out. I have breakfast in bed at nine and am in bed by ten p.m. Thank goodness, the Boss is having a country rest, too, at his friends' in Devon. He needed it far more than I did. After all, I'm geared, as it were, to a catastrophic existence: I adore excuses for sitting up late and I work better with a lot of noise going on, and nothing in the world seems so right and natural

to me as not to know from one hour to another what's going to happen. Also I haven't been thrice bombed-out, I haven't been sleeping at The Times, and I'm not engaged in two different works of scholarship requiring concentration. I've never admired the Boss so much as I do now, for he's really a tower of cheerfulness and a well of patience. He still *needs* long regular hours of sleep and freedom from noise as much as he ever did, but he somehow does without, and you can see his good strong soul taking charge and improvising its own peace and quietude. I'll never forget his telling me, in a moment of confidence, how he reacted to a stick of bombs that culminated in the one that fell just outside B. W.'s house where he was sleeping, and knocked it about badly. "I heard them coming our way," he said, "and then that extra loud whistle; I pointed out to the Almighty that I was there, and that I had no idea what arrangements had been made in that regard, but that on the whole I was willing to think that any decision would be a sound one."

He's very good at spotting silver linings, and so almost the only Londoner I know who won't make his reports-of-places-bombed sound worse than they are. Generally, it's: "Oh, didn't you know about x? That was last Wednesday. Right down to the ground!" I've heard him say a dozen times: "Nothing is ever as bad as it's made out to be. *Or* as good."

You remember my saying, and your quoting, that nothing's so bad when you know what it's better than? Thinking about France at Peace keeps the English from ever imagining that getting blotted out would be the worst thing that could happen. It is the

literal, provable, undeniable fact that shame *is* worse than death. The odd thing is that so many people who don't believe in the existence of the soul still instinctively recognize a fact that wouldn't be true if souls weren't more valuable and durable than lives.

Edinburgh, Jan. 18th, 1941

I was here for the Feast of the Holy Family and took great comfort in the Gospel of day. If you come across a copy of the *Missal* printed by Mame & Sons, with notes by Don Cabrol, get it—it's very helpful because it gives all the whys and wherefores and takes nothing for granted. I've finished my formal course of instruction and am now devoting all odd moments to preparations for an informal *viva voce*. Mrs. Belloc Lowndes has promised to be my god-mother. I knew you'd want her to be. I am going to stay with her early in February and S.M. is invited, too. This is all doing me a world of good. I'm feeling fine—all the better for the peacefulness up here.

(Undated but written Feb. 1941 to a group of Americans who had sent her money for the distressed in England)

I was reading, the other day, Daniel Sargent's *Thomas More*. He puts his finger on the word "sociability" as one which would (if it were dry-cleaned) refer to the essential quality of More. Whatever you call it, it's the quality in man that made civilization possible. In More it reached an almost prophetic intensity, witness the *Utopia* and his almost legendary success as a judge. He understood and personally felt every imaginable sort of link that binds human

being to human being. In that heavenly household of his, as on the bench, as among the humanist "Grecians" of Europe, you can always think of him with his arms round the two nearest shoulders as they all moved forward together: over and over you hear that phrase "merry together" in his prayers. Well, it's worth dwelling on that quality in More to get the full force of that terrible moment in his trial when the Justices stopped trying to cross swords with a better lawyer than themselves, and ran right under his guard with the reminder: You are trying to swim against the stream, indeed you are almost alone in what you say. They were in effect accusing a devout Catholic of appealing from Authority to Private Judgement. It wasn't open to More to say "Something inside me tells me I'm right." It would never have occurred to him to make (to him) such an anti-social remark. He must of course have been prepared for that thrust—he'd had plenty of time to think ahead, in his prison-cell; but for all that I suspect that the very sound of the word "alone" gave him an instant of sick blackness when he actually heard it from the lips of another judge. I tell myself that there was a moment of silence then, while he gathered strength to call his witnesses. . . . He stood with the Dead.

"For of the aforesaid holy bishops I have, for every bishop of yours, above one hundred; and for one council or parliament of yours (God knoweth what manner of one) I have all the councils made these thousand years. . . ."

Reading that I re-lived the incredible month of June 1940, when we realized that "the spirit of the



I'd like everyone who sent for the "Pattern of Freedom" to know that I, standing in Bumpus's, did in fact open that book at the Gettysburg Address. I shall always feel that Abraham Lincoln made a special trip to England to let me know that *he* didn't think I was such a fool for staying on.

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Christmas shelter-parties happen but once a year: so I've been doing some follow-up work on behalf of your clients through the cold, dank month of January. Every Guide can say that he's given at least one bag of peppermints to at least one wide-eyed small Londoner, and at least once has (in spirit and in effect and in truth) held to grey lips the hot strongly sweetened drink which sometimes makes the difference between life and death to a Shock Case.

And then I thought of a very special gift to give those generous givers.

I want them first to think of the costliness of a surgeon's hand. The amount of actual money that has been spent on training its sensitive muscles, and the years of time. And the look and feel of it, a hand that is washed for ten minutes or more before the rubber glove goes on: a hand that almost has learned to think for itself in a crisis.

Now they must think what hands do when they meet and clasp: how they talk silently, swiftly, by that basic sense of Touch from which all the other senses are derived: how they report back to their respective brains only as much as the slower intellect can understand, and flash the best part of the news direct to the subconsciousness.

Now I must ask them to gird up their imaginations and hear what I heard this autumn from our friend W.L.

"I knew Joan", he said, "when she was still in pig-tails. She had become one of the most promising of the younger surgeons. She'd been operating, mainly on children, right through some bad blitzes. But this thing happened on her night off. It was the building

where she had her own digs that was bombed. She was buried in such a way that they couldn't get her out for six hours without killing her, and some others, outright. It was only her hand that they could reach. A soldier appeared out of nowhere: he had no first-aid training or knowledge of rescue-squad technique. He just stayed there holding to that girl's hand. Didn't let go the whole time. When they finally got her out he disappeared again. The family is trying to trace him; they'd rather like to thank him."

Sometimes, when I think of that story, it becomes one of the innumerable symbols and omens of this whole war: the Unknown Soldier has, you know, at last stretched out the hand of comradeship to the Civilian. But often I just try to take that particular soldier's place for a few minutes of his long watch. Because in her intervals of consciousness, those hands talked to each other. "I'm still here". "Yes, I know." I have sent my own wordless messages in that pressure, such a true and born surgeon would take as comfort. "*Your work is going on, now, and it will go on forever.*"

This is what I've given your friends who were so friendly to me: the right to feel that they've come to the rescue of the Children's Hospital, Great Ormond Street, when it was savagely bombed. I hasten to say that they didn't lose one child in that disaster, largely owing to the devotion and quickness of the staff. The work *does* go on. It is almost unthinkable what the London hospitals have had to go through. Think of the worship of asepsis and then think of an operating theatre with every window smashed, where at a "near

one's" whistle everyone drops flat on the floor and is up again before the building stops rocking. And yet somehow most of those cases recover. Think what it means to those tired, gallant surgeons and doctors and nurses to know that some unknown people have reached all the way across the Atlantic to offer personal gifts of good cheer to them, and to their stout-hearted little patients. . . .

RCA CABLE (*to her mother*)

Feb. 17th

Was baptised Sunday first communion tomorrow.

## CHAPTER VII

# Christmas and a New Year

SHANE LESLIE sent a Christmas Carol of an original pattern to all his friends.

### CHRISTMAS CAROL, 1940

The planes are coming in a wave,  
God rest you Merrie Gentlemen,  
In basement, shelter or in cave!  
But may their aim go wide  
This joyous Christmastide.  
God rest you Merrie Gentlemen  
For like the Shepherds once, who kept  
Their watch, the Home Guard intercept  
Th' Invader from the air  
When skies grow bright with flare,  
So rest you Merrie Gentlemen  
Behind our Browning gun and Bren!  
SHANE LESLIE

Headquarters,  
B. Zone, Home Guard.

He sent it to Father Fenlon with the accompanying letter:

Dec. 17, 1940

Delighted to have your letter written two months ago. I have been through the Blitzkrieg since as I

am on General Gough's staff and spend 4 nights of the week here on guard. Every weekend we have a training school for officers and I am becoming quite proficient in street-fighting!! You would laugh if you saw me in battle dress with a tin hat and a gun but I find being a non-smoker and a teetotaler I can sprint about with the youngest! Those who finish that Tactical Course have T C sewn on their sleeves which the General says means "Theological College". It is an odd wind-up to my life to practise gangster fighting and I believe I look like one! The extraordinary thing is that waiting every night to be bombed one can be bored. Of course a big Blitz night is something to be remembered. I have seen stations, buildings, buses bombed but it is remarkable how everything goes on again in a few hours. To my great grief St. Mary's Catholic Church was gutted round the corner and I found myself wading in stained glass. My dear College of Eton which I shewed to the Donnelly's has been sadly hit. What a book I could write of the last three months! Anita is driving with the army in Kenya—Jack writes fairly cheerfully from Salzburg. There are 1200 prisoners in the old Palace of the Archbishop. The rest of the family all in Ireland. It is difficult to read or write attentively but the vivid moments make life terribly worth living. We all appreciate and almost feel the Hands of God moving around us like the old mystics. My life is about the most opposite to what I ever imagined or proposed but I feel careless like everybody and the event of victory now seems secure. But how I should love to be teaching English or even lecturing to St. Mary's!!!!

If I go I go—and I have had my life! We are quite ready for the Invasion!

It seemed impossible to get my own relations to say what they wanted for Christmas presents. At last, however, my sister cabled—and it was to ask, not for food or elegancies, but for books! She wrote:

I can't tell you how much pleased I am to have Allers' *Successful Error*. It is to me exceptionally fascinating reading, as far as I have got, although I don't think I am going to agree with him throughout. But it is delightful to have a book that one is always longing to return to, and it discusses several subjects that I have been wanting to explore ever since I gave up that kind of study.

Well, how lovely when all this is over and we reunite. . . . But I can't get over how much we have to thank for at the close of 1940.

First a happy New Year to you [a cousin wrote], and may God keep you and bless you in all your ways. I think we all look forward with great confidence to the New Year, feeling that we know the worst and that better things may be nearer than we dare hope. . . .

Eileen and Co., I think I told you, are in Scotland, and M—— writes that they look forward to better things and have "sunshine in their hearts." When the children were quite little, he taught them to say, "What does it matter if you have sunshine in your hearts," which Eileen said was infuriating as they always produced it when they woke her hours before

she wanted to get up! So it has become a family slogan.

I am very late in really thanking you for your most lovely Christmas present. I cannot tell you how much I loved the books you sent me. Father Farrell's *Companion to the Summa* particularly. I need hardly tell you that I have not yet got very far not having your power of concentration in the midst of a general family din—but what I have read is a great joy. I make no effort to absorb it fully as it is so obviously a book to read and re-read. At first the American style and the very modern American type of illustrating a point seemed astonishing, but I have got to like it very much. It may perhaps date the book a little as a standard work, but by freeing it from an atmosphere of over-culture and incidentally cultural luxury, makes it more accessible to the general public and less alarming to tackle. One is brought up cheerfully and vigorously to some sublime thought without being alarmed by a lot of erudite preparation such as Newman, for instance, would have given it. One has scaled the ladder almost without knowing it. That seems to me an incalculable asset. I think Chesterton paved the way for this type of approach—not discounting the subtlety of his thought, the greatness of his style—the sublimity of truth presented to the common reader in the common reader's language. I don't know if I have put what I mean at all well, but I love to tell you my appreciation of the book as a new thing come into life. It will be such a help in teaching the children.



Chesterton calls Thanksgiving one of the noblest of human attitudes and it is in that attitude that English Catholics seem to be standing before God as the New Year begins. A Grail Member, looking back and forward, sums up what she has learned and felt. She heads her comments startlingly to those who are far away from the atmosphere itself—

#### WHAT WE HAVE GAINED AFTER A YEAR OF WAR

##### I

*It has raised thousands and thousands of people in this country to the level of heroism.* Men and women who are ready to lay down their lives not only once, but hour after hour, day after day, week after week, month after month. Not only thousands of men in The Army, Navy, Air Force, but also thousands of civilians, men and women, who work during the day and expose themselves for our safety during the night.

They are all of them heroes and heroines, although they go about their duty in a most natural and unaffected way. This army of heroes is a great asset to a country.

##### II

*It has brought people together.* Class distinctions and other barriers have fallen away.

We have never been so much of one mind and will.

We have never been so near to one another.

We now talk more intimately and about more essential matters to a person whom we meet by chance in shelter or train, than before to our best friends.

This provides great opportunities for the apostolate.

There is a great work to be done for God and for our country!

Let us help to turn the war into a blessing!

### III

*War has made life simple and sober.* All fringes and frills have dropped off. We have adapted ourselves to the rationing much more easily than we thought we would. We make our clothes last longer and we feel proud of the number of their years.

Few places of entertainment are open in the evening.

This does not make life less interesting. On the contrary.

### IV

*We learn to appreciate things and to enjoy life.*

Instead of going to the sea side or abroad for our summer holidays, we explore the surroundings of our native town or village on a bicycle and have a holiday just as good and interesting as ever. We learn to appreciate a good night's rest, a clean bed, the fact that our very lives are saved day after day.

We enjoy growing our own vegetables, if we have a little garden or an allotment, canning fruit and vegetables for the winter, keeping chickens, perhaps

rabbits or if you are very ambitious, goats. There is less luxury, fewer amusements, yet we have never grumbled so little.

## v

*We have returned to the land.* What dozens of books, articles in the press, lectures, encouragement from the government could not do, the war has done within a year.

We have returned to the land and many of us will stay there after the war.

## vi

*The country is gradually returning to God*, as the leading papers, but also the so-called "yellow press", as the days of National prayers, as the reactions of people to personal losses testifies, and as you find day after day when speaking to people. This is the greatest thing of all.

Many luke-warm Catholics and other Christians, who perhaps were not used to living always in the grace of God, are now careful to keep their houses clean and be ready for the call.

Prevailing danger does good.

An American, like Mrs. Warde a war convert, sending New Year's greetings from London to the Convent of the Visitation at Georgetown, weighs in the scales of faith the gains and losses of "this fiery trial":

Although I have written you no letters since March the 30th when I had my first communion at

the Convent of the Visitation, I have thought of you many, many times and have remembered you in my prayers.

I used especially to think of that morning and all it meant, when I was in London in the worst weeks of the bombing in September and October. Bombs don't worry you at all as long as they don't come right on top of you. If they do come on top of you, whether you are frightened or not (and I have reacted both ways) you have a sort of bomb illness, which like any other illness runs its course, though no one treats it as such. I used then to think of the Visitation and all the peace of that March morning, and I would have the violence and destruction and frankenstein horror wiped right away, for after all this is only a nightmare, or the delirium of an ill world. Somewhere, I would remember, there is peace and goodness and I have been given a portion of that greater Peace which we carry in our hearts forever.

I often think of what you said that morning; I wonder if you remember it? You said, "It will be all right! We will win!"

At that time we had no idea of the terrible things which were yet to happen nor of the strange revelations of human nature which we were to see: how corrupt on the one hand, on the other how true: now weak and now strong: now grasping and materialistic, now selfless and noble.

Living over here among these people I have indeed seen what Walter Lippmann said of them to be true; that mankind owes them an infinite debt for giving us back our faith in mankind. What I have seen has been worth any little suffering I might have

experienced in a personal way. It has been a privilege to be here, to be near enough to see and meet and know the heroes and heroines of the war, and they are legion. In other words the whole population has risen to almost unbelievable heights.

God has been good to England for I can only feel it is one of His miracles. He has visited great suffering on these people and He has given them the grace to meet it. I often think about the new England that will emerge—there is already a new “brotherhood” among men and the other thing which must alter their whole natures is the surrendering of all material possessions, which they have done with such bravery, simplicity and gladness. Catholics are being particularly wonderful. Several of the V. C’s are Catholic and there are very few, of course, because it is the highest of all awards. Captain Fogarty Fegen of the Jervis Bay, who did the act which to me is most thrilling, is, or was a Catholic, for of course he sank with his ship. It has been much spoken of that the first V. C.’s in the last three wars were Jesuit trained men from Stonyhurst.

But aside from those who have been decorated I know of equally brave people who will never be heard of. Father Steuart, S.J. who is probably known to you through his books, is over seventy and is very delicate, for he was gassed in the last war. Because he is so valuable and so loved, and because he is both old and delicate he has been implored to leave London. And although the Jesuit church and Rectory of Farm St. has suffered again and again (it had already been five times damaged when I last saw it two months ago) Father Steuart remains in Lon-

don because there are many Catholics there who depend upon him. He will not sleep in the shelters but sleeps every night in his own bed. I am sure his windows have been blown out, for I believe the rectory has no windows at all.

I could tell you scores of stories about people of all classes who do the most wonderful and heroic things all day and many of them most of the night as well. I know a little man named Mullins. He is a man of the humblest origins; he is tiny, shrivelled and terribly delicate, but he gives his services as a voluntary Air Raid Warden and he simply offers himself up night after night with no more fear than a child has in its mother's arms. He is sometimes called on to dig out bodies and he works on without food or rest until the job is done, knowing all the time he himself may drop dead with heart failure. But Mullins never thinks of himself—I guess he is the one human being he has no compassion for.

When I came back here I wanted to go on with my instruction. I was sent to a Miss Boynton, a tall, very slender, charming person who must be very near sixty. She is one of the most delightful and holy women I have ever met, so sensitive that her colour comes and goes and she is almost too shy to look at you. She is highly intelligent and unlike little Mullins she belongs to one of the most aristocratic families in England. All her friends told me how delicate she has always been, and indeed she looks as if she might blow away. When war came she bought a car and learned to drive and joined one of the Voluntary services.

When the Blitz began she was away in Scotland

and I was delighted for I felt she of all people would be too delicate for such horror. But one morning I met her at Mass. She said, "I couldn't stay away—I had to come back!" She went on to tell me what she was doing. She went every day to the East end where bombing is bad in daytime as well as at night. She took out the surveyor who went around to test and listen to unexploded bombs, and from time to time she actually removed in her car such unexploded shells as he would think it unnecessary to call the soldiers for!

Miss Boynton still goes on week after week doing one of the most dangerous jobs any woman could do, and yet she is the most exquisite sort of person, the highly strung type who might easily faint if she saw a mouse.

So, if you think of it the war is really wonderful and beautiful. It is glorious to see a whole nation willing to suffer and die for the ideals of Christ, for the reason they are so strong is because they are fighting for freedom from evil oppression, for liberty for all men and for good as they know it.

I am ashamed at the fear one sometimes feels. The darkness and menace lie over us all here and we scarcely know what it all means. We do not know how many years it will be and for people separated from those they love it is long. We need many prayers and much help from God. And He *will* help us, I know. He helps us daily, whenever we ask it.

This letter is to bring you my good wishes for the New Year—to you and the dear Visitation. Thank you again for all you did for me and the wonderful

memories you gave me through your kindness and your hospitality.

Nothing that I have seen has expressed so fully as the Grail, the totality of the Catholic experience and outlook. So let us end with a letter from a Grail member, Caryl Houselander, who painted pictures for all their chapels and houses in England.

Jan. 12, 1941

Dear L.

Thank you very much indeed for your letter. I am so pleased to have it—and to have some desired news of you.

I am delighted to do the work you ask for—I do remember the style and the color of the Crucifix, I made for you to take to Australia, and I think I know the Stations to do for you.

I need hardly tell you that now the Stations of the Cross have become much more real to us than they ever were before. Our life here seems to have become chiefly the contemplation of Christ in His Passion. By that I mean that one almost sees Christ in so many people and now that there is so much real suffering of so many kinds one understands a little more how illimitable is His love in His Passion, which certainly goes on in each one of us.

To the natural eye it seems that out of this war nothing could possibly result but bitterness, hatred and ruin, and indeed nothing else could result from it were it not for one person—Our Lord. Because He has made us “other Christs,” because His life continues in each one of us, there is nothing that any



one of us can suffer which is not the Passion He suffered. Our redemption although it was achieved completely by Our Lord, does, by a special loving mercy of His, go on in us. It is one unbroken act which goes on in the mystical body of Christ on earth, which we are but it seems sad to me (though I don't doubt it is God's providence) that not many people know that they are living through this Passion.

We have realized on the natural plane that we must be united, and every single one of us must go out for our single purpose. We must put by all else and be ready to give all we have to the very last drop of our blood to bring about our one single purpose which is to gain and keep freedom.

If such an extreme is our duty to one another as human creatures, how much more is it our duty and our honour to give all we have and are, united in our Christhood, for the Kingdom of God.

The American Newspapers cannot exaggerate the courage, the humour of the people here, because it passes belief and cannot be exaggerated, there is no hate—nothing remotely resembling hatred. I have been among more people than I can tell you who have to lose or have lost their homes, and their families, and many who were wounded, but I have never heard anyone at any time say anything bitter or vindictive.

I regret that I shall not be able to make you the Set of Stations of the Cross I long to do, a set that would have for the backgrounds real places in London, exactly as they are now; such a set would be a real memorial of the war. Believe me, to Londoners at all events, London is most really a Way of the

Cross now. I could not send you this set though, because it is not allowed to send information abroad about where bombs have fallen.

I am doing designs for every Station and the Crucifix now, and I shall have them sent as soon as I can. I do not know if you have seen the little ones I did for the Chapel at Eastcote, if so, you will know that they are extremely simple, nothing really but line drawings done on wood with a brush, and as simple in thought as possible—I have wished in that case not to impose my own ideas. I shall make something of the same sort for your small ones.

I shall try to get wood to carve the candlesticks, and if I can't I will make some designs that go with the Crucifix, and send them to you hoping that you will be able to have them carried out there.

It is difficult to get enough wood to make things here. It is rationed and severely. But "Export trade" is encouraged, and for that reason I don't think we will have much difficulty in getting enough for your things.

The Ladies of the Grail here are wonderful, they have shown such tremendous courage and unselfishness through all the terrible trials that have come to them and Yvonne, takes it all with a kind of a beautiful dignity that is very inspiring. She will make Eastcote self supporting—that in any case is an example of a way of living which ought to be much more widespread here.

There are three lovely goats and they are all going to have kids! Many hens and lots of things growing, and I have noticed people there nibbling apples with a view to planting apple trees—so they will

have fruit and vegetables and milk and eggs and cheese. In these days, you can want no more—but they have more, for Philippa makes a sort of wine that she calls “Cyder”—but it is more invigorating than any cyder, I have ever tasted elsewhere!

Don't imagine from anything I have said that we are depressed here, no, sometimes tired, always in very great need of your prayers, but often we can repeat our Blessed Lord's Words “It was for this hour that I came into the world.”

CARYLL



















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